



# St. Stephen's

Episcopal Church † Lakeland, Florida

To Love and Serve God and Neighbor

"Whoever wants  
to become great  
among you must  
be your servant"  
Matthew 20:26



## ST. STEPHEN'S AND THE CORONAVIRUS

With so many news reports about the widening spread of the Coronavirus COVID-19, I wanted to briefly update everyone on the status of church services and events here at St. Stephen's, as well as share a few thoughts on how we as Christians might live and act in uncertain times.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

It is in Christ Himself that we have our hope—in this life and in the age to come. So no matter what our ever changing circumstances might bring, I'd encourage us all to weather every storm of worry, doubt, or anxiety together on the solid Rock of Christ Jesus Our Lord. So pray together, support one another, continue to reach out to those in need, and make wise and prudent decisions to protect ourselves and each another out of love and not fear.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

At St. Stephen's, we will be monitoring the relevant recommendations and mandates from both the health department and the diocese. We plan to continue all of our normal Sunday services and campus events as scheduled, but we will also be prepared to look at potential needs to postpone midweek programs or events on a case by case basis. So in a nutshell, here's what to expect right now:

- + 9am and 11am Sunday Services will continue, as well as other regular meetings.
- + There will be regular cleaning and disinfection of facilities after each use, and everyone will be encouraged to use the provided sanitizers and WASH HANDS.
- + If you or a family member is not feeling well, please stay home in order to recover and help keep the rest of our parish family safe. Let us know so that we might pray for you and check in on you.
- + If you have any underlying health concerns that make you particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus, please stay home. Let us know so that we might pray for you and check in on you.
- + For the time being, we are asking everyone to refrain from as much physical contact as possible, including hugs and handshakes at the Peace, holding hands during the Lord's Prayer, and the greeting line after the service ends.
- + A visual guide for Communion will appear in every bulletin, offering simple instructions on how we plan to limit exposure through priest-led intinction or receiving only the Bread.
- + We won't be passing the offering plates, but will instead have them set up and available in each worship space, near its entrance. Tithes and offerings can be deposited in them as you arrive or before you leave. We can also receive checks through the mail or help you set up electronic giving. Please feel free to contact the office for more information.
- + We want to make wise and prudent decisions, while resisting the temptation to panic. This is the Lord's House, we are His People, and St. Stephen's ought to continue to be a place of Salt and Light for the sake of the Gospel, a haven of Blessing and Peace to people in need, and an oasis of faith in a turbulent world. For this too shall pass.

Fr. David

"Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen." (Book of Common Prayer, p134).