



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF
El Camino Real
WALKING THE WAY
THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Lucinda Ashby
April 30, 2020

Dear people of the Diocese of El Camino Real,

I write to express to you my amazement at your leadership during COVID-19. As “Easter People,” you are walking with faith during uncertain times, seeking new opportunities, and “being church” in your homes and through use of technology. Thank you for sitting in this uncomfortable place and finding Easter joy.

While we are all still on shelter-in-place, there is a palpable push, really a rush, to return to a sense of “normal life.” Really it is a desire to go back to the way things were before March, yet we know that is not going to happen. COVID-19, while a biological virus, has impacted many parts of our lives—economically, socially, spiritually—and going back isn’t an option. Instead, like Jesus’ followers, we face forward to a new way of being, open to possibility and discovery. But the culture around us has a different view; the almost desperate push to physically re-engage, and soon, drives some risky behaviors.

The Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real will remain shelter-in-place, practicing non-risky behaviors and tending to our worship and pastoral care virtually. As your Bishop, I am committed to our well-being and the well-being of those we serve. Heeding the guidance and mandates of our State Government, and our respective County Health Departments, we will not alter our policies until such time as health and science tell us that is safe to do so—and then we will proceed with caution.

I have appointed a Phase III Taskforce to evaluate documents and information that will serve to guide us into re-gathering, when the time comes. This document will be available to you in mid-May. Until then, the following will help you to begin to plan ahead:

Phase I: Shelter-in-Place. This is where we are now:

- Hold only Virtual Worship Services
- Allow for no more than 3 persons to film and produce Virtual Worship services
- Maintain physical distance, at least 6 feet between persons
- Wear masks as guided by the County Health Department

Phase II: Preparation. Following Diocesan, County Health, and Statewide orders and guidelines, we plan to:

- Clean the entire facility
- Organize a team to clean before and after each worship service
- Coordinate with those who share the plant to follow mandates and guidelines
- Establish guidelines for church staff, rotating presence on-site
- Discuss what-if scenarios, including how to roll-back when needed

Phase III: Gradual Re-entry. This is the next part of the plan once we have met the requirements of the State and Local officials for religious organizations. For the Diocese of El Camino Real, this will include:

- A completed re-entry plan, with approval from the Bishop
- Gather in groups of 10, 25, 50, 100 in a gradual roll-out, with 14-days of no new cases in-between each incremental step; we will roll out by deanery
- Use only the Daily Office or Liturgy of the Word for in-person worship
- Wear masks (required), maintain physical distancing protocols
- Maintain virtual worship and education for those unable to attend
- Be prepared to roll-back, when cases increase

Phase IV: Being New Church. In this phase, we would have successfully navigated the requirements of Phase III and show that we can all safely gather and resume activities.

- Establish and maintain safe practices for in-person Eucharist
- Maintain virtual worship opportunities for those unable to attend
- Resume in-person education programs
- Resume weddings, baptisms, funerals
- Resume and increase outreach programs
- Explore new learnings, new opportunities for ministry and mission

We will walk through these phases together, with care for each other and for our communities.

In his [Pastoral Letter to the Episcopal Church](#), this is what our Presiding Bishop refers to as “sacrificial love”—putting common good before individual desire. I would add that the word “sacrifice” means a holy offering. Your adherence to these policies and procedures in the months ahead is your holy offering to our diocese, our towns and cities, and all of God’s people.

With a grateful heart for your leadership, sacrificial love, and patience,



*The Right Rev. Lucinda Ashby
Bishop of the Diocese of El Camino Real*