Dear Friends in Christ,

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” That is an exhortation believers receive in the book of Romans. Throughout this pandemic we have been called to all of these — to rejoice, to hope, to patience, to constancy, and most of all to prayer.

At the beginning of the pandemic we were planning for a few weeks of doing worship online and maintaining physical distance. Of course, that time has now stretched to months and we have seen both spikes and dips. We have seen hot spots emerge and things seemingly calm down, but one consistent thing we have seen is that when guidelines are relaxed or not followed closely — when people stop being vigilant — more cases emerge, more people get sick, and more people die.

As the Vestry and staff have looked at the coming months, and looked at the trends in our communities and nationally, we have come to a difficult decision — we will need to maintain our current state of affairs for some time longer.

We have made the decision, with a unanimous vote of the Vestry, to continue to limit any potential re-gathering in person for groups, services, and ministries of more than ten people until January 6th — the Feast of the Epiphany. In other words, our current phase of ministry will remain in effect until then.

As schools re-gather we have quickly seen them close again after outbreaks. As churches have met again we have seen them suspend operations a week or two later when multiple cases have emerged.

Right now, in Pima County, the earliest the schools see being able to have any in-person classes is mid-October — if then. When students do return we will have an almost unprecedented situation when people who have been isolated will suddenly be all together in close proximity to teachers and staff. These folks will then go in and out of their homes and communities.

We don’t yet know what a second wave may look like though the expert opinion is almost unanimously in agreement that fall and early winter will bring a second wave of new cases. This confusion will be compounded by the flu season as well so do not yet understand the course this pandemic will take.
Even though we do not understand the course of the pandemic we must understand that one of our core Christian obligations is to our neighbors. Seeking and serving Christ in all persons must mean seeking the best for their health and well-being. We must take even more care with their lives and health than we would even our own.

Our unique position as the largest Episcopal parish in the state of Arizona and one of the largest churches in Tucson means that we also have a unique responsibility. While we would all love nothing more than to be ready to start gathering we cannot risk becoming a superspreader for infection in our community in order to prove our bravery or faith. Our witness to God’s love is compromised when we put our needs or desires ahead of the good of the community around us.

The Lord knows our faith. He knows that we have been steadfast in hope, constant in prayer, and patient in this time. He also knows that we will have done everything we can to preserve and protect the lives of those who are at risk both in our parish and outside of it. What we see in Scripture and in the lives of the saints is the willingness of Christians across history to live, love, and serve in places and times that challenged them to live ever more Christlike lives in the midst of difficult days.

As we live, worship, and pray in our own day we will offer a range of opportunities in the weeks and months ahead to remain faithful together. In two weeks, we will be releasing a program calendar for the early fall which will list courses, studies, small groups, and outreach opportunities. We hope that you will continue to send prayer requests and let us know if you are struggling with the seeming loneliness of this time or know someone who could use help.

In the weeks to come let’s stay fixed on the call of Romans to rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation, and to be constant in prayer.

Yours in Christ,

Fr Robert