

**Surely, it is God who saves me;
I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense,
and he will be my Savior.**

From the First Song of Isaiah (Isaiah 12:2), BCP, p. 86

A Pastoral Letter to the Dioceses of Missouri and West Missouri

The Feast of Saint Philip and Saint James, Apostles
May 4, 2020

It is news to no one that the world has been living through a frightening, confusing, and stressful time. Millions around the world, over a million in the United States, and thousands in the State of Missouri have contracted COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a version of a coronavirus. Unfortunately, this disease has brought widespread death across the world, our nation, our state, and our communities. Across our two dioceses, Episcopalians from our parishes have been adversely affected, some in the direst ways. Loved ones and neighbors have passed from this life to Life Eternal because of this pandemic. Personal financial situations have been unfavorably altered. Businesses face huge challenges not of their own making. And the fallout has been much broader and far-reaching than we can possibly describe here.

During this time, heroes have emerged, and noble character has been on display.

Our thoughts turn first to the medical community—to the doctors, nurses, and technicians who attend to the sickest of the sick—but we also remember the custodians who disinfect rooms, food service workers who deliver meals, chaplains who bring the solace of faith to bedsides, and First Responders who go into frightening situations to care for and transport the sick.

We express our admiration for teachers of all grade levels and in all fields. Moving with swiftness to adapt from in-classroom teaching expertise to online curriculum and teaching methods, these largely unsung heroes deserve our respect and admiration. We convey ours now.

We also honor those who provide essential services such as transporting goods to our grocery stores, hospitals, and homes. We admire those who stock our grocery shelves and process our purchases at the cash registers. We pay tribute to all who are working for the common good.

We send our thanks to the clergy of our dioceses who, like teachers, have moved from the familiar ministry of in-person worship and formation to the largely unknown world of streaming worship and virtual formation events. Their display of ingenuity and hard work, their willingness to innovate and to carry on ministry in an unusual time and under novel demands, has made us proud to wear the yoke of ministry with them.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge all those who every day have continued to go to work, sometimes with fear in their hearts because they do not know what they will pick up at work or what they will bring home from work to their families. We see them. We salute them. The food, fuel, prescriptions, clothing, and other goods that we need to carry on our lives come from these faithful workers.

It was said of another group of heroes in another time, “Uncommon Valor was a Common Virtue.”* We believe this is true of the heroes around us in this arduous and stress-filled day. Thank you all.

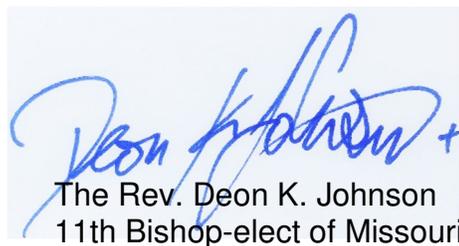
Yet, we are not only aware of the examples of self-giving, courage, and ingenuity. Pastorally we are keenly conscious of the reality of loneliness, which too often leads to depression, and which in the most lamentable cases can lead to suicide. This has been an all-too-common fallout from COVID-19 or from fears stemming from its presence in our midst. Days of physical separation and confinement can carry a heavy emotional and mental health toll. We call on the churches and individual Episcopalian Christians to be mindful of, and to offer companionship and solace to, those whose lives are being immeasurably touched.

We challenge our churches and our society to care for the needs of those who are suffering economic harm as a result of the pandemic. Many business owners have had to close their establishments. Over 30 million citizens are unemployed. Crucial assistance has been offered by our several levels of government. Can the Church be a place to which people can turn when government funds and assistance run out before they finish rebuilding their financial lives? This is a challenge for the Church of our day, a challenge to which we hope our dioceses will rise.

We conclude this Pastoral Letter by asking God to convey bountiful blessings upon the faithful of the dioceses we are privileged to serve, and we add our own expressions of love and solidarity to all with whom we labor in the Lord’s vineyard. May God’s Holy Spirit guide you into all truth, grace, and love in serving the Lord.



The Rt. Rev. Martin S. Field
8th Bishop of West Missouri



The Rev. Deon K. Johnson
11th Bishop-elect of Missouri

* Engraved on the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial in northern Virginia across the Potomac River from Washington, DC