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Pastoral Letter to the Clergy & Congregations of Trent-Durham

***please circulate widely**

Re: Novel Coronavirus COVID-19, cessation of Public Worship March 2020

Dear Friends in Christ ~ grace to you and peace this day.

I am lifting you up in prayer without ceasing. God is faithful and present to us, hears our cries and our pain, our joys and our longings. I appeal to you to remember to praise and pray to the Holy One of Blessing, who loves each and all of us, pursues us, encourages us, accompanies us and especially does not forsake us. We are beloved. Thanks be to God.

In these unfamiliar times, we should be prepared for disruptions – over the coming days, weeks and months. So I write to encourage you to hold fast to your faith, to know that you are beloved of God and dearly beloved of your church community ~ God is love, and love lives on beyond this earthly form. God is light ~ where there is light, where there is love, there too is God. We know that nothing can separate us from this love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord ~ from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Jesus is with us, now and in the world to come.

In these times, I ask us to consider how can we creatively envision opportunities for ministry ~ supporting one another, the vulnerable and the lonely ~ through keeping in communication ~ on email, in writing, through phone calls and food deliveries on doorsteps? Many of us have friends and family members who live in far off places ~ so we already know how to keep in touch, up-to-date with life changes, maintain connections. Now we need to find ways to do the same for our neighbours around the corner or down the road. Please share with me, and with each other, how are you doing these work-arounds?

We all become vulnerable and lonely in times when community gatherings are discouraged – Sunday worship is the highlight of the week for many of us. How can we check on one another, support at a distance, ask for help when we are feeling isolated and alone? We have a great advantage of social media, telephones and internet access ~ let's use it to uplift, encourage, share our lives and our stories of inspiration, faith, humour and interests.

We can be certain of the results of this Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 ~ to some of our family and church family. There will be loss, and we will need to mourn. "Church" is the people ~ our church will be affected. Hold each other in prayer with lovingkindness. I ask your prayers for me and for the leadership of our church, that we continue to navigate this rapidly changing situation in good faith and with good judgment.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, wherever you are. May God richly bless you,

Bishop Riscylla