

Holy Tension *by Fr. Randy*

I don't know about you, but I am living in a world of anxiety and unknowns. I guess you could better frame it as a Holy Tension. It is a Holy Tension of mixed feelings—trying to get my arms around the enormity of the ongoing health crisis and the great number of ways that it is impacting people in our community and around the state and world.

I am getting a sense that the Holy Tension I feel in my bones is moving away from the many ways it is directly impacting me, and gravitating towards a tremendously powerful sense of how it is impacting others. I wonder how we are to move forward, balancing our needs to safeguard the sanctity of life and health of ourselves and others, with the necessity of carefully re-opening commerce and returning to jobs, sources of nourishment both physical and emotional. I am learning the deep and undeniable core need of connecting to family and community—the natural and normative state of being human.

And so we wait. We wait for decisions by elected leaders, businesses, schools, health officials, economic experts, faith leaders, and eventually our own selves. How do we decide what is best for us in this time of Holy Tension and confusion. One of the strategies we can employ is to plan and prepare for possible outcomes—being ready to move forward with best practices presented in anticipation and response to the circumstances handed to us. And I believe that is exactly the same strategies employed by members of the early church as documented in the Holy Scriptures and the writings of early theologians.

In *The Early Christian Traditions*; Volume six, by Rebecca Lyman, the first Christians were, "...close knit religious communities created by message and faith of the first apostles. Consisting of small house churches bound together by belief and simple ritual..." Further on in her writing she states, "What gave strength to the community was the combination of inclusive membership and exclusive belief." (*Cowley Publications; 1999, pg. 32-33*) This early Christian community thrived upon a liturgical life that was simple, involving a regular common meal and baptism for the initiation of new members. In our current time of Holy Tension and isolation due to COVID-19, neither of these basic cornerstones of Christian life are easily attained. Connecting of our faith family is now being done in alternative ways, ways that are sometimes awkward and "ill-fitting." The words sometimes easily rise to my lips, "*We've never done it that way before!*" *No we haven't—but, we can!*

ECMN has gathered together a strong team of subject matter experts to help devise a framework of how we can safely and confidently re-enter into gathering once more as a faith community. This strategy is based upon a series of Phases which will be initiated based upon the fluidity of the COVID-19 event and public health recommendations. The following is a thumbnail sketch of the Phases towards re-opening worship services and gathering in our parishes, (please find more detailed information at the ECMN website.)

Phase 1- *Where we are today.* Practice physical distancing and comply with the state Stay at Home Order. Gatherings and worship services will not be held in the church building. On-line and virtual services are allowed.

Phase 1 ½- Begin recording/streaming worship from buildings once more.

Phase 2- Returning to church offices while continuing mitigation/public health recommendations. May consider a “soft opening” of smaller groups for in-person activities with physical distancing.

Phase 3- Lifting physical distancing with determination of public health officials. Worship sizes and group gatherings could increase in number.

ECMN will be looking for input and plan for needs of individual parish context and needs.

Do we have dates in mind for when these Phases will be reached? No we don't! And that is the source of much of this Holy Tension I/we are feeling today as a faith community. The isolation and solitude of this current health crisis will eventually make way for our more familiar forms of gathering and being in Christian community. It is our responsibility today to pray for and support all those who are suffering during this crisis, to pray for those who are on the front lines of health care and scientific research, to pray for care and support of those within our faith family and our neighbors, and as importantly, to love and maintain connections with each other. We will do these things together, with God's help.

The Book of Common Prayer contains a prayer *For Strength and Confidence* (pg. 459):

Heavenly Father, giver of life and health: Comfort and relieve your servant, and give your power of healing to those who minister to our needs, that we may be strengthened in our weakness and have confidence in your loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I hold each of you up in prayer as we together work through this time of Holy Tension. Know that God loves you, and so do I.

Randy+