

St. Mary's Episcopal Church (Anglican)



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Aloha Saint Mary's 'Ohana,

This past Sunday I shared an important announcement: Bishop Fitzpatrick has sent out a communication to the diocese to let us know that we have his blessing to resume congregational singing beginning on November 14. He expressed his deep appreciation for our diocesan-wide commitment and diligence in regards to limiting the spread of the virus during the recent "Delta surge." I want to echo this and also say that Saint Mary's has been a remarkable testament of faithfulness during this difficult time, even when it sometimes felt as though certain decisions did not make sense. We have exhibited humility and teachability during this time, to a degree that I think makes you the envy of many priests in the Episcopal Church (which further underscores the blessing I feel to have been called to be yours).

The bishop has urged us clergy to take a reserved and gradual approach to our return to congregational singing. As he has said to us, we're not completely out of this yet. I think we all agree.

To that end, beginning on November 14, we will continue with the liturgy as we've had it for the past several months, but with congregational singing of the hymns and service music (with continued wearing of masks, of course). With Advent approaching, it makes sense for us to maintain the current "feel" of the liturgy until we change things up.

Advent allows us a jumping on point for new and renewed liturgical practices. One thing that I want to share with this congregation is the saying of the Angelus as a prelude to our service in Advent. The Angelus is a short series of prayers that focus on both the Annunciation and the Incarnation. This usage is a growing custom in some quarters of the Anglican Communion and is very fitting for the season of Advent, where we focus on the Annunciation and the Incarnation. It is also very fitting for a church named in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Angelus would be accompanied by the chanting of the Magnificat and would be followed by a short break prior to the start of the eucharistic liturgy.

My agenda for introducing this is two-fold: one, I want us to be exposed to not only some traditional practices that are much beloved throughout the Christian world, but also to enrich our understanding of Saint Mary. Secondly, I want this offering to open up the space for us to resume Saint Mary's custom of singing praise-and-worship music as a prelude to the liturgy. Given that Advent is intended to be a season of stillness, it is more appropriate (liturgically-speaking) to begin with something a bit more musically subdued. I also would like for our praise-and-worship offering to be part of a shortened version of Morning Prayer, as a means to prepare us for the eucharist. I think it would be most appropriate to begin this in the Christmas season, so we can get in more Christmas hymns.

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Lastly, I want to announce that Advent will also see us offering a service of Evensong on Saturday evenings. Evensong is chanted Evening Prayer. I've been desiring to offer this ever since I arrived at Saint Mary's, but the pandemic has thus-far prevented it. It will be held in the Soldier/Memorial Chapel, with time still to be determined, but I'm thinking early-evening (not after dark). Currently, the intent is to offer it during Advent and then see if it will be a continual offering after that season. I'm also hopeful that it might come to serve as a means for welcoming people to Saint Mary's that might otherwise not worship with us on Sunday mornings. I welcome any input from you all that might help me find a good time for it (maybe we can pique the curiosity of folks waiting for tables/take-out at Wagaya?).

Additionally, the bishop's letter notes that Aloha Hours can resume, but with protocols in place. As we've had a few folks in this congregation that have taken on a coordinating role for Aloha Hours, we'll be in communication about when this will become a regular part of our life together. Be on the look-out for more information soon.

Current models of the pandemic give a hopeful forecast for us. Let's continue to pray that these models are accurate and that we might be entering the end of this season.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

E mālama pono,

Fr. Charles A. Browning II