



The Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem

The Diocesan Office

My friends,

I write to you to share my thoughts about how Vestries should continue to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities during these extraordinary times.

1. Clergy Pension Assessments: Church Pension Group (CPG) extended a waiver for clergy pension plan assessment in a letter dated March 23, 2020. One requirement for that waiver is that the bishop must certify there are "inadequate resources (including endowments) within the affected congregation **and** diocese to pay assessments and continue to function." After conferring with representatives from Diocesan Council, Finance Committee, and the Standing Committee, we have concluded that we, as a diocese, do not meet that criteria and cannot certify this requirement for waiver at this time.
2. 90-Day Extensions on Benefits and Insurance Payments: CPG has offered a 90-day extension for insurance and benefits payments in a letter dated March 27, 2020. I highly encourage you to take full advantage of this offer if necessary.
3. CARES Act: On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act became law. I highly recommend you participate in the CARES Act programs, even if you do not yet understand the financial impacts on your church caused by COVID-19.
 - a. The "Paycheck Protection Program" (PPP) section of this law applies to our diocese and can provide financial relief to your church through loans from U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) lenders. These loans may be forgiven if they satisfy certain criteria. Your church may apply beginning April 3, 2020 using this applications (link: <https://diobeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Paycheck-Protection-Program-Application-3-30-2020-v3.pdf>). More information about this program can be found in this fact sheet (link: <https://diobeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/PPP-Fact-Sheet.pdf>).
 - b. Also, of note in the CARES Act is provision for childcare providers, a ministry for some of you. I recommend that the leadership body of your childcare ministry investigate the Department of Health and Human Services' "Child Care Development Block Grant." (link: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-faqs-in-response-to-covid-19>)
 - c. Finally, with regards to the Diocese of Bethlehem Canons and your incurring indebtedness, the bishop gives consent and approves your participation in CARES Act programs by notice of this letter.
4. You are not alone: I cannot emphasize this point enough. We are in this journey together as a diocese. If you are struggling financially, please contact me. As a diocese, I believe we have the ability and resources to overcome our challenges, but I also believe we can only do this together and in partnership.

Please know that you are in my prayers. Each weekday, the bishop's staff gathers at least twice via video conference. We celebrate Noonday Prayer during our second gathering at which we pray for every church in the diocese. I feel honored to work with you in our ministry of sharing the good news of Jesus with the world while discovering new and hopeful ways to be church.

Steve