

AAC Interview with Archbishop Foley Beach

On Thursday, May 7, 2020 4 PM via Zoom, the American Anglican Council hosted an interview with ACNA Archbishop Foley Beach to discuss the topic of reopening our churches in the wake of COVID-19.

Archbishop Foley began his remarks by stating how proud he was of the bishops, priests, and members of the Province for the creativity, spontaneity, and innovation to keep the gospel spreading despite restrictions on physical worship services. He then encouraged members to care for their clergy by making sure they take time off to rest and recuperate from the stresses and challenges that this time has presented. He also noted that several clergy and members have had COVID-19 with some sustaining devastating and lingering health effects.

He also encouraged us to consider how we will care for the unemployed in our midst and asked congregations to rally around and help their neighbors. He reported that care and street ministries have carried on despite restrictions on volunteer participation and that support for the hungry and those experiencing homelessness has grown through the church and the Matthew 25 provincial initiative. Online attendance during the pandemic restrictions is greater than in-person worship prior to the stay at home orders and encouraged congregations to continue their online presence in the future quoting Ed Stetzer, "Don't see to return to normal; seek to return to a new normal."

In answer to the question, "How do we minister in this new season?", the Archbishop shared the following guidelines:

1. Pray, asking "What does the Lord want to do through you in your specific situation at this time?"
2. Remember that all churches are experiencing different circumstances that will affect their choices to re-open. Such factors include government orders, hot spots of the virus, size and age demographics of the congregation, and whether buildings are rented or owned, therefore, there is not "one size fits all" decision.
3. Work closely with our bishop and continue to communicate what you are doing in your area.
4. Two questions to be asking in considering reopening:
 - a. "How do I love my neighbor as myself through this process?"
 - b. For clergy: "What does it mean to be a good shepherd at this time?"
Clergy are called to feed the sheep but also to protect the sheep. Don't lead your sheep into danger.

Archbishop Foley also outlined the guidelines that he has given his own Anglican Diocese of the South.

1. Reopening will be a process – Understand and follow the CDC and White House guidelines for worshipping communities.
2. Don't move ahead of local government and health authorities in your area. "Be the second to open, not the first." (Ed Stetzer)
3. Have a plan to implement in different phases of re-opening, again in accordance with CDC guidelines for worshipping communities.
4. Decisions for re-opening should be made by both the rector and vestry together, not one or the other, for there to be a united way forward and a broader base of strength when decisions are challenged.

5. Not everyone should return once re-opening occurs, e.g. older congregants and the health compromised.
6. Practice social distancing. If there are limits on the size of gatherings, increase the number of services to accommodate.
7. Use common sense guidelines such as using masks, washing hands, and monitoring symptoms.
8. If Communion is served, it should be bread only. The celebrant will be the only one to consume wine.
9. Continue online worship. We've entered a new culture in which newcomers will first worship online before ever attending a physical service.
10. Everyone will put on a mask before entering the building including all clergy. Clergy may remove their mask to preach or celebrate only.
11. Vulnerable clergy should remain at home

The Archbishop also recommended the ten questions listed in "The Senior Pastor's Guide to Re-Opening" by Church Fuel: <https://churchfuel.com/reopening/>

Q&A

Canon Phil Ashey of the American Anglican Council then posed questions from attendees. The answers to these questions are briefly summarized below. To hear the full discussion, visit <https://americananglican.org/aac-toolbox/covid19/a-conversation-with-foley-beach/>

The Archbishop noted that we are all trying to lead when there's no map. He noted that he hopes the church will be present after the pandemic in a way that it was not after the Spanish Flu of 1918 and the ensuing "roaring 20's". He noted that we have an incredible mechanism now in the internet to continue gospel ministry that didn't exist at the turn of the 20th century and hopes that our "20's" will be a time of gospel impact.

1. In response to questions regarding making an impact while wearing masks and social distancing, Archbishop Foley encourage connecting via phone to avoid Zoom exhaustion and to talk to neighbors on the street. He also encouraged the visiting of the lonely while outside, wearing masks, and social distancing.
2. The CDC has advised that there be no corporate singing in sanctuaries due to the increased spread of viral particles while singing, so some bishops have advised no singing. This directive does not exclude soloists who are appropriately distanced from others to avoid the spread of the virus.
3. A question was asked regarding how to conduct children's ministry and support parents who may also be young in their faith. The Archbishop noted that many congregations have been holding Zoom and Facebook Live children's meetings with great success, creativity, and imagination.
4. In answer to the question as to whether pandemic restrictions have compromised our civil liberties, Archbishop Foley answered that he believes that they have in some instances, but that we haven't been prohibited from proclaiming the gospel, so "keep it up." He also encouraged us not to get caught up in conspiracy or apocalyptic theories and to stay focused on the mission of spreading the gospel.

5. Archbishop Foley also encouraged us to reach out to medical staff and first responders by praying constantly for them and giving thanks to the Lord for their service. He also encouraged parishes to research the needs of these families in their area, whether it be childcare or meals, etc., and to reach out in love to them in the Name of the Lord.
6. The Archbishop recommended delaying baptisms for now.
7. It was noted by Canon Phil Ashley that many churches have discovered that the service of Morning Prayer may be more attractive to those outside the church. Other churches have recovered the use of the Daily Office offering services of Morning and Noon Prayer and Compline online. He wondered whether this may be an opportunity to recover the use of the Catechesis with catechumens attending a service of Morning Prayer and then proceeding to instructional time, while the body of believers continues with the service of Holy Communion as in early Church eras.
8. In response to those who decline to wear masks to church, the Archbishop encouraged clergy to remind these members to love their neighbors as themselves, to follow the guidelines of their bishop, and to honor the governmental regulations in their local area.
9. In response to the question of how the pandemic has reshaped the thinking and strategy of the ACNA, the Archbishop replied that he hopes that the current internet presence of our churches will continue to impact our communities after all phases of re-opening since our liturgical form of worship has touched people in unexpected ways and increased attendance.
10. Canon Phil Ashley asked the Archbishop to respond to a Walter Brueggemann quote in terms of the hope, imagination and missional vision the ACNA has to offer. He answered that the hope of the gospel has the answer for death on everyone's mind, so he commended clergy to offer an opportunity to receive Jesus and His salvation at every opportunity. He believes that we have already witnessed incredible imagination through the creative responses that have been made to the pandemic restrictions Province-wide. He believes that our missional vision to reach North America with the transforming love of Jesus Christ stands. He asked, "How can we reach people in a way that their lives are transformed by the gospel?" He suggested that the Catechesis may be a way forward.
11. In response to the question as to whether we are going to experience another Great Awakening or increased restriction after the pandemic, the Archbishop responded that we need to be in prayer and sow the seeds for a Great Awakening. He doesn't believe people of faith will easily tolerate increased restrictions given some responses that he has already witnessed.
12. When asked what a church's position should be regarding physical regathering for those who are longing for connection, the Archbishop continued to encourage caution for those who are vulnerable and to utilize the internet to stay connected as much as necessary.

In closing, the Archbishop noted that it was the National Day of Prayer and encouraged us to be in prayer for our brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering extreme deprivation, persecution, and locust attacks during the pandemic restrictions. He also encouraged congregations to reach out to their international partner dioceses to find creative ways to help in this time of challenge.

He also shared II Chronicles 7:13-14 as the Lord's response to Solomon's prayer in chapter 6:28-31. He noted that the parallel passage in I Kings 8:37-40 expands on the prayer in II Chronicles 7 but includes the "side note" that each person should be "aware of the afflictions[plague] of his own heart" as they

pray. He encouraged each of us to ask the Lord to show us the plague in our own hearts and ask what healing needs to happen there. What is the affliction there He needs to heal? The Archbishop has been asking himself these questions before the Lord and has been profoundly impacted and freed to pray for the plague outside himself more effectively as a result.

In answer to the question of how we might be praying for him, the Archbishop asked for prayer for wisdom and guidance, to be honest with his own heart, for his wife, Alison, for wise decisions in a place where there is no map, and for preaching His word alone.