

# CHURCH CLOSING OPPOSED BY CLERGY OF PHILADELPHIA

## Strong Protest Signed by Twenty-two — Death of Rev. Edward S. Hale

The Living Church News Bureau }  
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**O**FFICIAL reports indicate that the influenza epidemic has been the cause of more than 10,000 deaths in the state of Pennsylvania during the first half of this month. Philadelphia alone reported 711 deaths in one day recently, most of which were due to influenza, and undertakers were busy burying the dead first and applying for burial permits afterward. The clergy in many cases went to the cemeteries to perform the last sad rites of the Church, only to find the graves undug or only partly dug, and the feelings of the mourners can better be imagined than described. However, the unselfish devotion of the doctors and the nurses, and the work of volunteer agencies, coupled with the measures taken by the health authorities to combat the disease, have at last brought about a decline in the death rate and the epidemic is on the wane.

Public services in the churches are still prohibited except for small groups of people. Some of the clergy, while availing themselves of this concession, desired to go on record as opposed to closing the churches and limiting the number of worshippers, believing there never was a time when public prayer and supplication were more necessary on the part of all the people. A remonstrance to this effect, prepared by the Rev. Dr. Tomkins, rector of Holy Trinity Church, was signed by twenty-two of the clergy at a special meeting in the Church House last week. The protest was given to the public press, and a copy was sent to Dr. Krusen, director of health and charities. It read as follows:

"We, the undersigned clergymen of the Episcopal Church in the diocese of Pennsylvania, do hereby protest against the closing of the churches and the suspension of public worship because of the prevailing epidemic.

"We recognize fully the seriousness of the situation, and we are doing all we can to help the sufferers and to prevent the spread of the disease. But we believe that such a trouble calls for renewed and redoubled public prayer and worship, that God, our only help in time of need, may recognize our trust in Him and send relief.

"None can deny," writes John Fiske, "that religion is the largest and most ubiquitous fact connected with the existence of mankind upon the earth." Religion bids us appeal to God at all times, and that not only privately, but by public prayer in church. Such has everywhere been the custom for centuries. And people, even those who are not professing Christians, expect it. They look to us as ministers of God to lead them in public supplication. A prominent physician writes:

"Many of the faithful looked that a way might be found to evade the regulation of the board of health, and that an opportunity might be offered those who valued their Christian privileges to approach the altar."

"A layman writes: 'Thousands of laymen have wondered, hurt and baffled, as to why a protest was not sent long ago by the clergymen of Philadelphia, at the time when the sympathy, love, and power of our Heav-

enly Father need more than ever to be brought to a stricken people.'

"And another writes: 'To close the churches and deprive the people of the Sacraments is worse than a blunder.'

"These are only suggestions of a widespread feeling that now is the especial time when our churches should call the people together for worship, strength, and prayer.

"The argument that people can pray in private, as well as in public, is the old and well-worn argument against all church-going. From the earliest days, even amongst the Jews, the people were bidden to come together and pray. The Christian Church has made public worship a part of her life as taught by the Master, and special prayers are placed in our Prayer Book to be used 'in time of great sickness and mortality'.

"With due respect for those in civil authority, we believe that it is inconsistent to close churches and yet allow people to crowd together in cars and stores. 'Business must go on,' it is argued. But business is suspended by law on Sunday. And besides, in such a time of suffering and peril it is more important to pray to God, all the people being called together for that purpose, than to carry on business. Moreover, there is far less danger in a church, where people gather to pray for an hour or so, than in a crowded place where the people throng all through the day. But, more than that, we believe that God will care for His people when, in obedience to His will, they meet to plead with Him for deliverance from evil, to confess their sins, and to go to His altar in remembrance of Christ's death and in accord with His command.

"We make this protest, not as declaring our intention to defy the ruling of the board of health, but to assure the people under our care, and the Christian people of Philadelphia, that we suspend our services unwillingly, and that we believe such a ruling is wrong."

The annual institute of the diocesan Board of Religious Education, which was to have been held at the Church of the Holy Apostles on Wednesday, October 21st, has been indefinitely postponed by the committee on arrangements owing to the epidemic. Bishop Rhinelander was to have delivered an address at the institute in commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary, and other prominent leaders were on the programme. The same programme, as nearly as may be, will be carried out at a later date.

### A VICTIM OF THE EPIDEMIC

On Thursday, October 17th, occurred the death of the Rev. Edward Stuart Hale, one of the younger clergy of the diocese and rector of St. Stephen's Church, Manayunk, to which he was called in 1912. Death was due to pneumonia following an attack of influenza. He was an ideal pastor of his people, and he may have contracted the disease through his devoted attention to the sick and the dying. Interment was at St. David's churchyard, on Monday, October 21st.

His wife is a daughter of the Rev. W. C. Rodgers, D.D., president of St. Stephen's College.