

Clergy Webinar
February 16, 2020 Shrove Tuesday

After offering an Opening Prayer, Bishop Susan shared these remarks:

We begin our time together with a few announcements. I will then give an update on our pandemic gathering protocols. Following a time of Q and A, we'll break into small groups for discussion and sharing.

Ted Smith re Parochial Reports – the time is drawing near when your parochial reports are due (March 1!) If you are having trouble accessing the report online or cannot put your hands on the password, please do contact Ted Smith at tsmith@thediocese.net.

This week you'll receive an email from our Minister for Communications, Nancy Chafin, asking you to invite members of your congregation to subscribe to the diocesan e-news service. Nancy will also provide a letter template you can customize to send to your church members. This will be of help to you, since more people will receive the news of the diocese directly and won't need to depend on you to share it. We used to reach 35,000 people with our quarterly magazine, The Virginia Episcopalian. Now that we no longer produce that magazine, we want to keep our people connected in other ways. So when you receive this week's email from Nancy, please be in touch with your parishioners and personally ask them to sign up for the diocesan enews service.

Carrick Brooke-Davidson, spouse of Bishop Jennifer Brooke-Davidson shared a new initiative to support clergy spouses. He's participated in one for spouses of Bishops and has found it a great help. There is now a closed [FaceBook group for conversation](#) and he suggests that clergy may want to pass along this information to their spouses so that we can gauge interest in such a group.

Bishop Goff's Presentation

We are nearing a year since this pandemic changed nearly every dimension of our communal lives. A year! Within days we will reach the tragic benchmark of half a million deaths in this country alone. A priest of our diocese, the Rev. Ruth Walsh, died of COVID-19 on January 21. (May she and all who have died rest in peace and rise in glory.) The distribution of vaccines remains slower than we've hoped for. The virus continues to mutate, with 7 new variants now in the US. Distancing, mask-wearing and other protocols must remain in place for some time longer.

And there is good news. The 7-day average rate of new infections is falling. Eleven counties in our diocese are now in the orange category instead of red, and more are heading in that

direction. With hope and trust that the trend will continue, and after discussion with leading scientists and bishop colleagues in neighboring dioceses, we are able to revise the thresholds for gathering in person outdoors and indoors.

In person worship may resume outdoors when the 7-day average rate of new infections is 25 per 100,000 or fewer. Currently, eleven counties are below that number. If your church is in one of those counties and you desire to do so, you may worship outdoors according to the plan you have made and submitted. If you don't yet have a plan and want to gather for worship outdoors, please make one and send a one-page summary to bishopsoffice@thediocese.net.

In person worship may resume indoors when the 7-day average rate of new infections is 10 per 100,000 or fewer. This is a higher, more liberal threshold than we announced early in the pandemic, based on all that we have learned and experienced in the past year. No county in our diocese has yet reached the threshold of 10, but some are approaching it. It is my great and heartfelt desire that in-person worship, whether indoors or outdoors, will be possible and safe for those of you who wish to offer it during Holy Week, Easter and beyond. If you have submitted a plan for indoor worship and received a go-ahead from our regathering task force, you may begin indoor worship, according to that plan, as soon as numbers reach 10 new COVID cases per 100,000 persons or lower, on a rolling 7-day average.

I suggest that it would be wise to wait until the number is 10 or below for three weeks in a row so that you won't be in the position of doing indoor worship one week then having to pull it the next if the numbers go back up. We leave that decision, though, to you and your wardens or vestry.

To date, 50 of our 179 congregations have sought permission for indoor worship. If you are one of the majority that has not and you would like to be able to offer in-person indoor worship when the numbers allow, please be sure to write and submit your plan. When the numbers allow, your plan will cover all worship, including weddings and funerals. In other words, if your county infection rate is at 25 per 100,000 or below, you may do any service outdoors. When the rate is 10 per 100,000 or below, you may do any service indoors according to your submitted and approved plan.

The Easter season is a prime season for baptisms. When you are able to do outdoor or indoor worship, you may do public baptisms as well. Please be sure to wear masks and stay distanced, except for the brief time of the water baptism and Chrismation.

Drive-in worship may continue for as long as you choose.

Congregational singing is still not safe indoors or outdoors, except in cars with closed windows at drive-in services.

When you gather outdoors or indoors, you may distribute communion in one kind, bread only, according to the guidelines.

Remember that we still don't have clear answers from epidemiologists about the efficacy of the vaccine in preventing the spread of the disease. We know that it protects the person vaccinated against serious illness, but we don't know if persons vaccinated can still spread the virus. So for now, guidelines and protocols remain the same for everyone, vaccinated or not.

Everything I've said will be sent to you in the follow-up email tomorrow. Our website will also be updated by the end of the day tomorrow with these revisions. Please share this information with your vestry and congregation.

I ask Canon Mary Thorpe to show you where and how you may submit your plan for outdoor or indoor worship, and where you can track the numbers.

Canon Mary Thorpe's Presentation

Here's the link to the map you can use to determine what your daily new cases per 100,000 persons average is: <https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>

Check the [FAQ](#) for the link to the revised Guidelines and Checklist for indoor worship.

For outdoor worship, drive-in worship, or live-streaming or recording approvals, please send a brief email outlining your plan to follow the guidelines found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Note that singing is still not permitted, except inside cars with the windows up in drive-in services.

We will take questions for about 10 minutes now. Then we will break into small groups. If your question doesn't get answered in this short time, please send it to bishopsoffice@thediocese.net and we will respond in writing.

Questions and Answers

For outdoor worship: is there a cap on how many people may gather? **As in much of our work on gathering and regathering, the space determines the number: every household needs to be six feet apart from every other household. In terms of determining the maximum, the Governor's Executive Order 72, amended on January 27th and lasting until February 28th, says this:**

B. OTHER CONTINUED RESTRICTIONS 1. All Public and Private In-Person Gatherings

All public and private in-person gatherings of more than 10 individuals who do not live in the same residence are prohibited. A "gathering" includes, but is not limited to, parties, celebrations, or other social events, whether they occur indoors or outdoors. The presence of more than 10

individuals performing functions of their employment or assembled in an educational instructional setting is not a “gathering.” The presence of more than 10 individuals in a particular location, such as a park, or retail business is not a “gathering” as long as individuals do not congregate. This restriction does not apply to the gathering of Family members, as defined in section II, subsection D, paragraph 2 living in the same residence. Subject to the following requirements, this restriction shall not bar individuals from attending religious services or assembling for educational instruction with more than 10 people provided: 13 a. Individuals assembled for educational instruction adhere to the applicable physical distancing and sanitization plan and guidelines of the relevant governing body or educational institution; b. Individuals attending religious services: i. Practice proper physical distancing at all times. ii. Mark seating and common areas where attendees may congregate in six-foot increments to maintain physical distancing. iii. Ensure that any items used to distribute food or beverages either should be disposable or washed or cleaned between uses between individuals who are not Family members. iv. Conduct routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently-contacted surfaces prior to and following any religious service. v. Post signage at the entrance that states that no one with a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 is permitted to participate in the religious service. vi. Post signage to provide public health reminders regarding physical distancing, gatherings, options for high risk individuals, and staying home if sick. vii. Individuals attending religious services must wear face coverings in accordance with section III below. viii. If religious services cannot be conducted in compliance with the above requirements, they must not be held in-person. Further, any social gathering held in connection with a religious service is subject to the public and private in-person gatherings restriction in section II, subsection B, paragraph 1.

The Executive Order says that this does not apply to worship activities, because of the constitutional question of right to worship, but common sense says that if it is risky to gather in a group elsewhere, it’s risky to gather for worship. Please use your common sense as to what would be the safe way to gather outdoors, keeping in mind the wisdom of the restriction.

Please repeat the thresholds for indoor or outdoor worship. It’s YELLOW zone for indoor (10 or less), ORANGE zone for outdoor (25 or less).

If we received permission for outdoor worship last year do we need to re-apply for permission in the coming weeks? **Good news! You don’t need to reapply!**

Whom do we contact to find out the status of our indoor plan? **Please do touch base with Randy Alexander, who heads up the Review Team for Phased (indoor) regathering. He can be reached at ralexander@icoh.net.**

What about small groups of church members gathering away from the church or at the church? Consider the level of new cases in your area and ascertain the level of risk. We still recommend no more than ten, properly distanced, masked, following distancing guidelines.

Will Episcopal visitations resume confirmations? We are in the process of scheduling virtual visitations and hope to start scheduling in-person visitations, but we note that none of the Bishops have completed the immunization protocol, so we will keep you posted.

Is there any variance in the threshold for in-person, indoor worship if the vast majority of the congregation has been vaccinated? (You define "vast majority.") I suspect not, given what the Bishop just said, but... No, not at this point.

Still 50 people max, either indoor or outdoor? It is whatever the Governor's threshold is (see above). We designate the markers to regather, and approve plans based on ability to space folks out.