

# Clergy Call Summary

## January 12, 2021

Bishop Goff opened with prayer. She noted that the focus of this week's gathering is what clergy need to carry on their work in the present deeply unsettling environment, and that there would be ample time for small group breakouts. First, though, she offered several announcements:

### **Six Days of Prayer as We Approach the Presidential Inauguration**

#### **January 15 – 20**

There is a six-day cycle of prayer available on the Diocesan [website](#) for the days leading up to the Inauguration. There will be day-by-day postings of each day's pray on the diocesan FaceBook page as well. Prayer is always the centerpiece of our faith lives, and all are encouraged to pray particularly in these challenging times.

### **Change of Topic for Next Week's Call**

Despite having announced resourcing God's mission as the topic for next week's clergy webinar, as you have requested, we'll talk about leading and speaking truth in a time of great challenge and violence.

### **Parochial Report Forms**

You have received your parochial report forms for 2020 and some of you have questions about how to count attendance and Communicants in Good Standing for the unusual year.

**Regarding Average Sunday Attendance (ASA):** The Parochial Report Form gives these instructions: "For 2020, calculate Average Sunday Attendance for January 1 through March 1 only." The next section of the form asks you to provide information and in-person and online worship separately. This section is distinct from calculating a summary ASA. Directions are provided. We recognize that such counts by nature may be imperfect. Do your best and be assured that we and those in the wider Church leadership understand the particular challenges of the past year.

**Regarding Communicants in Good Standing:** The canonical definition states that communicants in good standing are baptized members of the congregation who 'have received Holy Communion at least three times during the preceding year' and are faithful 'in corporate worship, *unless for good reason prevented,*' and 'in working, praying and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God.'

Most of us have for good reason been prevented from in-person, corporate worship and from receiving communion three times in the past year. Use abundant grace and generosity in your count, knowing that we and those in wider Church leadership understand the particular challenges of the past year.

There are narrative questions on the form this year. Please do put your time and energy into those questions. There is also a section for reporting your congregation's work toward racial justice and reconciliation. This is another area where we hope you will put some time and energy, since this will be the first time we are widely gathering such information as a Church.

If you have particular questions, please reach out to us by sending an email to:  
[Bishopsoffice@thediocese.net](mailto:Bishopsoffice@thediocese.net).

Note from Ted Smith: there is some helpful info regarding the parochial reports include webcasts on the General Convention website: <https://www.generalconvention.org/forms-and-instructions/#PR-Instructions>

## **Ash Wednesday Worship and the Imposition of Ashes**

Because infection and death rates from the novel Coronavirus continue to increase, in-person gatherings for worship on Ash Wednesday 2021 will not be possible. This includes Ashes to Go activities, since one cannot impose ashes in a public setting while maintaining six feet of distance.

Worshippers may receive the ashes, however, in their own household settings during a ZOOM, live-streamed or recorded Church service. Any baptized persons, including older children and teens, may place the ashes on the foreheads of others in their households, or on their own foreheads. One does not have to be ordained or licensed to impose ashes on others or on themselves.

We will send you suggested guidelines that you can share with your congregations about how they may take part in Ash Wednesday services in this way. We hope that this might empower lay ministry.

Some may immediately ask, “why may lay persons impose ashes during a virtual worship service but not share communion during a virtual worship service?” The difference lies in one word, as all of you understand. That word is “Sacrament.” The Holy Eucharist is a sacrament of the Church while the Imposition of Ashes is not. This might be a teaching moment in your congregation regarding the nature of the sacraments.

## **2021 Bishops’ Visitation Schedule**

You will soon receive the 2021 Bishop’s Visitation Schedule. We will begin visitations on the Sunday after Easter. Given the continued, rapid rise of COVID infections and the slowness of deployment of the vaccine, visitations will not be in-person for the first number of months. (Dr. Fauci told a group of faith leaders on Friday afternoon that we may attain some semblance of normalcy in the mid-fall of this year.) Visitations for the first half of the year will be done virtually. The bishop and clergy will talk a few weeks before the visitation to make appropriate plans. We look forward to resuming a regular, pre-determined schedule of visitations even before we can be with you in person.

A reminder about tech tips for virtual annual meetings: [http://www.thediocese.net/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/Covid\\_resources/Tech\\_Tips\\_for\\_a\\_Successful\\_Online\\_Annual\\_Meeting\\_final.pdf](http://www.thediocese.net/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/Covid_resources/Tech_Tips_for_a_Successful_Online_Annual_Meeting_final.pdf)

**Summary Continues on next page...**

## Feature Topic/Discussion

### What do you need in order to pastor your people in this moment?

#### Post-Breakout Q&A

Can we have an ashing station with ashes in individual ketchup cups similar to the way we have distributed communion? Households can then come get ashes and ash members of their household, or can you suggest alternative ways of distributing ashes for people to impose in their homes? *See the forthcoming guidelines. There is no need for you to provide ashes.*

How wonderful that the we are encouraging families (families of 1 person to many) to impose ashes at home. Might a resource be available for children's formation regarding Ash Wednesday and this very creative imposition? *We'll ask Paris Ball to see what resources she can find and let you know.*

The question from our group is metrics. We are told that we can do nothing until the numbers improve; what is that number? And further, what exceptions can be made for rural areas? *Our guidelines have said that the daily number of new cases per 100K persons, averaged over seven days, must be 5 or less. This is consistent with the guidance we have gotten from epidemiologists and public health experts and from Dr. Fauci. We will keep you posted as the numbers start to decline if there will be adjustment to that particular metric. Insofar as rural areas are concerned, it may seem that that metric is unduly harsh for such areas, but the reality is that this is deemed by the experts to be the fairest metric to use. Note that your small community is not an island: your parishioners go to other localities to the doctor, for food shopping, to work. The crossover is real and the high numbers of infections (now the highest they have ever been in Virginia) should cause us all to be particularly cautious.*

The parochial report in my context is a combination of efforts among the parish admin and myself with the input of others. I would like to request that there be some kind of workshop for parish admins who prepare the report. Possible? *We'll see what we can do and will keep you posted.*

How do we answer when people ask why do the Roman Catholics get to meet and be together and we can't? *Wisdom from attendees: This is what the epidemiologists tell us is the safest approach that they recommend. We have a different sense of ecclesiology. A conservative stance coming out of a place of love, in consultation with scientists. You're making this decision out of safety. Gatherings have led some RC parishioners in our community to become infected after gathering! It has backfired in some places. Out of an abundance of care. Our faith in God protects us from fear but not from the virus. Our guidance is more conservative than the Governor's because of the Governor's concern re constitutional issues. He can't make the harder choices but we can, out of love. I sometimes try to draw the distinction between assessing personal risk (I choose to go to a place) vs. creating risk for others (opening our doors to the public). I have explained the Idea of sacrificial abstaining so that we will all be able to gather together in the end.*

I'm wondering how to address the issue of armed conflict five miles from my parish. How do we speak to the violence? How do we speak in a moment that is highly politicized and divisive? *We got some very helpful guidance about this in a session with the Presiding Bishop, Stephanie Spellers and Todd Ouseley*

*on Monday, which we share with the attached [Powerpoint](#). These are hard choices we are faced with. We want to be prophetic voices AND we also want to keep our people safe.*

Bp. Susan, there is another meeting scheduled for next week. Can you please start with some thought about his question next week? *Definitely.*

Let us know if you want us to facilitate a smaller group gathering, like maybe downtown Richmond. *Contact Mark Eastham or send an email to [bishopsoffice@thediocese.net](mailto:bishopsoffice@thediocese.net). Noting that the Central Richmond Clericus is on Thursday and we expect this will be a topic of discussion.*

*Noting the continuing work of Braver Angels, a group that tries to facilitate healthy conversation across political difference: <https://braverangels.org/>*

There were several comments from the small groups about what would be most helpful to the clergy now:

- *time to play*
- *several mentioned vacations (real vacations!)*
- *ways to physically gather with one or two people*
- *a clear path and permission to share communion with parishioners in the church even if it's family by family for short services*
- *more facetime btw Bishops and congregations*
- *clarity of where clergy fall in the vaccine roll out and what do they need to do*
- *colleague group for working through how to lead the congregation into what the church is becoming*
- *2nd round of PPP loan information*
- *some conversations/thought about post pandemic church and what it looks like*
- *how to minister pastorally to people at this time with restrictions and cold weather*
- *we hope these Zoom chats will continue, even past COVID. We find them so helpful and they build community and facilitate conversation.*
- *Vaccine rollout for clergy*
- *want a little bit of autonomy for us and our church to make wise decisions*
- *creativity and permission to try things (safe things) whether or not they stick/work*
- *the opportunity to talk and process and support one another among (like what we just did) is what we need now*
- *We need stories of hope and joy.*