



May 5, 2021

Dear Clergy of the Diocese,

Grace and Peace be with you from God our creator and our savior Jesus Christ.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued new guidelines last week. As a result, we have revised our guidelines for worship, pastoral care and other activities in the Diocese of Virginia.

A few cautions to keep in mind:

1. Only 29% of the population in Virginia has been fully vaccinated. Therefore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines that pertain to fully vaccinated gatherings do not yet apply to all Church worship and activities.
2. The virus is not yet under control. In some states, infections and deaths are climbing. Therefore, while we seek to ease some restrictions, we must be mindful that the virus we face is still deadly. People are still dying, and our primary calling is to keep all people safe.
3. New variants of the virus are surfacing even here in Virginia, so we must take care not to let down our guard yet.

A reminder about resources:

- [Diocese of Virginia guidelines](#)
- [CDC guidelines](#)
- [Commonwealth of Virginia guidelines](#)

And a note of thanks:

Thank you for your commitment to placing the health and well-being of God's people above the growing desire to return to Pre-Covid worship and fellowship. This past year has been difficult and disorienting. Many times, we have felt like the Israelites in between the old life and the promised new one, and yet we have endured. Thank you for your faithfulness.

Revisions to Diocese of Virginia Guidelines

(as of May 5, 2021)

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1. **Masks.** New CDC guidelines suggest that it is not necessary for those who are fully vaccinated to wear masks at "small outdoor gatherings with fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people." However, speaking aloud carries a high risk, and our worship includes spoken responses from everyone. Therefore, masks should continue to be worn by everyone whenever people gather to worship, whether outdoors or indoors.
2. **Physical distancing** must be maintained during worship, whether outdoors or indoors.

3. **Music.** A soloist or small ensemble, masked and distanced, may sing. Brass and other wind instruments may be played with appropriate bell covers. Other instruments may be used. **Choir Rehearsals** may resume, with all participants masked and distanced. Indoor rehearsals should last no more than 30 minutes. **Congregational singing** may resume outdoors, with all worshippers masked and distanced. It is too early for congregational singing to resume indoors. Results of a recent study on singing during the pandemic can be found [here](#).
4. The **Eucharist** may be celebrated and communion distributed in one kind, following the [current guidelines](#). Everyone over age 16 in the altar party, all Eucharistic Ministers and all Eucharistic Visitors must be vaccinated.
5. **Pastoral Visitations.** Fully vaccinated clergy or lay eucharistic visitors may make pastoral visits to parishioners. If the person being visited has not been vaccinated, then a brief visit, outdoors, masked and distanced, is the best practice. Close contact, as when praying over someone or offering a blessing, should be kept as short as possible. See also [current guidelines](#) for Eucharistic Visitation. If the person being visited has been vaccinated, an indoor visit may take place.
6. **Staff and small groups.** If the entire church staff, vestry or other small group has been vaccinated, they may meet indoors or outdoors, masked and distanced. If everyone has not been vaccinated or if there is uncertainty about who has been vaccinated, then gatherings must be outdoors, masked and distanced.
7. **Bibles and Prayer Books.** Data regarding transmission of the virus through paper or books shows that the risk is low. Therefore, Bibles and *The Book of Common Prayer* may be returned to pews and used during worship.
8. **Cleaning.** Cleaning of all surfaces remains important. However, a professional deep cleaning before and after every use is not necessary.
9. **Educational and other non-worship activities may occur,** following the same guidelines that are in place for worship. The same maximum attendance numbers apply, based on the physical space, as do requirements for masking, distancing and cleaning. This means that Sunday School and summer programs for children and youth, with an appropriate number of participants, may be planned and offered.
10. **Contradictions.** Should you experience confusion or detect contradictions in diocesan guidelines, please: a. Always follow the most recent guidelines. b. Please let us know so that we can clarify confusion.

Although the risk of COVID-19 infection among fully vaccinated people is likely low, the following increase the risk:

- A moderate, substantial, or [high level of community transmission](#).
- Settings in which a moderate or high percentage of unvaccinated people (including children) are present, or one in which people at risk of severe COVID-19 disease are present.
- Visits to indoor settings especially with poor ventilation.
- The length of the visit, especially if indoors.
- Crowding or when there is a decreased ability to maintain physical distance.
- Activities that involve singing, shouting, physical exertion or heavy breathing, inability to wear a mask, or inability to maintain physical distancing.

We pray for the continued decline in new infections and in deaths, and for an increase in vaccinations as we slowly resume beloved activities.

Thank you for your faithfulness and all that you do for our Lord and his Church.

Faithfully yours,

The Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff
The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Brooke-Davidson
The Rt. Rev. Porter Taylor
