



**Clergy Call with Bishops
June 22, 2021**

Bishop Goff's opening remarks:

We have much good news to share today about where we are as we emerge from the pandemic, even as the pandemic continues and we remain attentive to the most vulnerable.

The current national vaccination rate for adults in the United States as of last Friday is 60%. In Virginia the rate as of Friday is 50%.

Ten counties in our diocese are now in the Green Zone, meaning there is one new infection or less per 100,000 people on a rolling seven-day average. No counties are in the red. One county is in the orange, with 10 to 24 new cases per 100,000 people. The rest are in the Yellow Zone, with 1 to 9 new cases per 100,000 people.

With this news, it is clear that we are emerging from the pandemic. We have grown and learned, even as we have been tested and exhausted. Infections and deaths are decreasing, and the light at the end of the tunnel continues to grow.

And there is challenging news because the virus is still active and spreading, and people are still dying. Last week we passed the benchmark of 600,000 deaths in the United States. Fifty percent of Virginians who are eligible to be vaccinated are not vaccinated, and no children under the age of 12 are vaccinated. New variants of the virus continue to emerge and the dangers from them are real.

On May 28, I wrote a letter to you lifting our Diocesan COVID protocols, guidelines and restrictions and leaving decisions in your hands about how and when to regather for worship and other activities. I encouraged you to develop local protocols regarding the wearing of masks and singing in the congregation, and I continued to recommend that you refrain from sharing a common cup or a common loaf of bread until there is a greater scientific consensus.

Since then, the other bishops and I have visited many congregations, sometimes via ZOOM, sometimes in person outdoors and sometimes in person indoors. The services were different from each other and local guidelines differed from place to place. I felt personally safe in every setting and believe that members of the congregation were safe. Thank you for this good work!

Today I ask you to continue to use the May 28 letter as a support in your decision-making. In particular, I remind you of these portions of the letter:

Masks

Please continue to think carefully about what you will require regarding masks. According to the CDC, those who are fully vaccinated no longer need to wear masks in every indoor setting. Remember, though, that half of Virginians are not yet fully vaccinated, and children under the age of 12 are not eligible to be vaccinated. How will you protect those who are not vaccinated? How will the congregation continue to model care for those who are vulnerable?

Eucharist

Until we have more information, please continue to refrain from using the common cup and a common loaf of bread during the Eucharist. I ask that you continue to offer communion in one kind (bread only) for the time being.

Singing

Recent CDC guidelines tell us that singing indoors by fully vaccinated people is a safe activity. Therefore, singing is once again permitted by choirs and congregations, as you feel comfortable. Those who are not vaccinated remain at risk, so you may choose to ask everyone to wear masks when singing.

Do be attentive to the verbs I used in the letter and that I continue to use, particularly regarding communion. What I wrote was, "Please continue to refrain from using the common cup and a common loaf of bread." And "I ask that you continue to offer communion in one kind only for the time being." Many of you have rightly noted that this is not a commandment or an episcopal directive. You may think about and experiment with ways to share communion other than having people drink from or intinct in a common cup. Should you choose to consider this now, please think carefully through three things:

- How might wine be shared without potentially spreading the virus and harming the vulnerable?
- How can wine be shared in a way that excludes no one.
- What does the particular manner of sharing wine say to the congregation about our eucharistic theology, about how Jesus is present, and about the nature of community?

Finally, a word about us, about you. This has been hard. We have been through a period of continuous, unrelenting stress. We have experienced some trauma in the past year. There has been significant anxiety in this time, some of it connected with specific things, some of it free-floating. There is continuing anger loose among us and our people, and growing frustration that things are not moving fast enough. You and I have sometimes been the target of the anger and frustration, and we've been the place where the anxiety lands, so that we have borne the anger and anxiety of other people on top of our own. We are tired now. We're exhausted. We've pivoted so much and so frequently in the past 16 months that we are dizzy and off balance – and we have to keep on pivoting for some time longer. Through it all:

- Be assured that the exhaustion is not a failure; it is normal at this time. It's not comfortable or even familiar to a lot of us, but it is natural and unavoidable right now.

- So be gentle with yourself. Do whatever you can to quit the contortions of kicking yourself up one side and down the other. Do whatever you must to silence the pesky inner critics. Be as kind to yourself as you are to other people.
- Take a sabbath day every week, without fail. Take a vacation this summer. Enjoy doing things that refresh and restore you.
- Continue to stay close to God in prayer and worship and study.
- And never forget that you are God's precious and beloved child, and God is holding you tight in the arms of unending love.

Q & A

What are some options for sharing wine during Communion?

Some churches have had success using a flagon of wine that they consecrate and then pour into small cups. While it's not a common cup, it's a common flagon. For theological reasons, we don't encourage the use of prepackaged bread and wine. If you do experiment with ways to safely share the wine, please share with us what's working well, and what doesn't work. And, of course, you may continue to offer Eucharist in one kind.

Can the Diocese provide guidance on obtaining a license for FM transmission of services? Is a joint diocesan license an option?

We will look into the joint license. Some churches are already using FM transmission. We encourage to reach out to them for guidance.

If your county is in the green, do you need to continue wearing masks?

It's your call. Bishop Susan: "At indoor services, I continue to wear a mask when I'm not speaking. I do so to protect the most vulnerable."

Any change in masking plan for campers at Shrine Mont?

At this point, campers and counselors will continue to wear masks in some circumstances. Campers will be in cohorts and will not be required to wear masks while in their smaller cohort, but to wear them in larger group activities. Campers are asked to bring at least 10 masks.

Can we take up offering passing the plate?

Yes.

Lots of questions about the Diocesan Day of Commitment which includes regional confirmations. Here are your answers:

When: Saturday, September 18, 2021 | 10:30 a.m.

What: Services of Confirmation at the same time on the same day in five locations across the Diocese.

Who: Candidates for confirmation, reception and reaffirmation.

Where:

St. James's, Richmond

Trinity, Upperville

Northern Virginia – The Falls Church, Falls Church*

Charlottesville and west – St. Paul's, Ivy

Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck – if there is interest, please notify us and we'll schedule a service.

*This service may be provided in Spanish and English if we have candidates who are Spanish speaking. Please [notify the Bishop's Office](#).

Note: For churches who have Episcopal visits scheduled, confirmations will also take place during those visits. The diocesan Day of Commitment is an additional opportunity.

How to Sign Up: You will receive a sign-up form from Anita Lisk soon.