



## Summary of Clergy Webinar January 26, 2021

Opening Prayer from Bishop Porter Taylor

Announcements from Bishop Goff

The Bishops and Canons of dioceses met with Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health yesterday. He spoke to us as a scientist and as a Christian who came to the faith as an adult. I share a brief summary of what he said to us in his presentation and in the Q and A. Here is what he shared:

- The two authorized vaccines are highly effective.
- Other vaccines are being developed and will likely be announced soon.
- By the end of March, there will be more than enough doses to vaccinate 100 million people.
- It is not yet known if having the vaccine keeps you from harboring or spreading the virus. Therefore, masks must still be worn by those who have received the vaccine. Dr. Collins says we will have more data in 4 to 6 weeks and will know the answer then to the question of whether someone who had the vaccine can spread the virus.
- Herd immunity is achieved when 85% of people have been vaccinated. Without herd immunity, this virus will continue on and on.

There is no scientific controversy about the efficacy of the vaccines, or about the value of wearing masks. Unfortunately, as we have experienced, these issues have been politicized. Dr. Collins believes that tens of thousands of lives have been lost because of this politicization and the subsequent refusal of people to wear masks. Vaccine hesitancy has also been politicized.

We faith leaders have a role to play in this. Especially in speaking with vaccine hesitant people, the “teachable middle.” Let the congregation know when you have been vaccinated.

“When it is offered to you, take the vaccine.”

Preach or write about why getting vaccinated is a matter of faith. It is for the sake of our own health, our own bodies, which are a gift to us from God, and for the sake of other people. Be beacons of truth.

Some who were on this call asked Dr Collins, “What metrics should we use regarding regathering in our churches?” He said that there is no national response to this question yet. The risks are sufficiently elevated, so we don’t advocate for in-person worship yet. More data is being collected. We will know much more, we hope, in four to six weeks.

Let me be clear about this timing - in four to six weeks we will have the data needed, according to Dr. Collins, to make a good decision about when regathering might be safe, and under what particular

circumstances. We will not begin regathering in 4 to 6 weeks, but will have the information to determine and communicate a timeframe.

We as Episcopalians name three sources of authority for decision-making: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. We respect our tradition of engaging reason when we listen to and learn from science and research, as we are doing now. We bishops and the canon of this diocese will continue to learn from top scientists and doctors so that the decisions we make for the health and safety of God's people are always grounded in facts and in the best information available.

We also recognize that, in the midst of so much emotion, fear and anxiety, holding fast to our current protocols is difficult. We experience loss, we long for certainty, we wish for a return to former life-giving patterns. And we are responsible for one another. We are our brothers' keeper, our sisters' keeper, our siblings' keeper. So keep on keeping on in our fast from in-person worship for a while longer for the sake of the wider community.

How does this apply directly to us in the Diocese of Virginia?

Where we are regarding pandemic mitigation and regathering?

Canon Mary Thorpe has created a quick reference Q and A that is now the lead on the COVID-19 section of our diocesan website. It lists what is permitted and what is not right now, and will be updated regularly. I ask her to summarize it briefly now.

Here's where you can find updates regarding the [FAQ with the new Quick Reference Guide](#) from Canon Mary Thorpe

**Feature Presentation: training for lay eucharistic visitors to take communion to people in their homes or other settings.**

This was introduced by Bishop Porter Taylor, presented by the Very Rev. Charlie Dupree and the Rev. Whitney Edwards. A link to the guidelines can be found [here](#), and a link to the training video can be found [here](#).

This is part of an effort to figure out how to connect our traditions in the church to what is needed in the times in which we live. Charlie and Whitney shared a video. There is also a written document that outlines the detailed instructions. Any time we come into contact, we have to be careful that we don't transmit the virus. Dr Collins pointed out how important social distancing is. Being outside is always the preferable way to do this. The creative way of finding a way to distribute the wafer is also important. Consider how we can be adaptive and yet still be true to who we are.

**Q&A**

Do we know when clergy will be eligible for the vaccination? We don't appear to be listed among the essential workers in the Commonwealth schedule.

**We had the same question, given our roles providing pastoral care in many settings. We asked Dr. Danny Avula, who is the "vaccine czar" for the Commonwealth of Virginia. This is what we received from his assistant at the Virginia Department of Health:**

“While clergy are not eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1b or 1c explicitly by their occupation, some members of clergy may be eligible based on specific services they provide to the community. For example, clergy who work with hospitals or jails would be eligible as part of those groups. **If this applies to you, please contact that particular organization to discuss opportunities for vaccine.** Additionally, Phase 1b now includes people aged 65 and older, and people ages 16-64 years of age with certain conditions or disabilities that increases their risk of severe illness from COVID-19. People will access the COVID-19 vaccine in a variety of ways. Many people who are included in Phase 1b because of their age or increased risk due to a health condition will be offered a vaccine through their healthcare provider. The ability to schedule appointments will depend on the supply of vaccine available. To keep abreast of vaccination eligibility for individuals, VDH has developed **an interactive map** to enable Virginians to determine which COVID-19 vaccine phase their local health district is in: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-vaccine/phase-by-health-district/>”

We note that some health districts are including clergy in earlier groups, so do check with your health district.

The FAQ page says we cannot make pastoral visits except for end-of-life situations — so why are we learning how to do lay eucharistic visitation? Is this only permitted for end-of-life situations at the moment? **It will take you some time to get your people trained. We wanted to get this to you ahead of time. That said, some of the principles would also apply to the work of clergy in these visits, so please do consider what is being taught here in your own work.**

What if the recipient of the visit is not very mobile? **If there’s a table set on wheels, you can set up the communion on the table and then roll it toward it. If they are immobile they may have a family member or home health aide who can assist.**

Do all of these restrictions exist if both the priest and recipient are fully vaccinated? There is a conflict with what the bishop just said about vaccinations and that we are not sure if people vaccinated can still carry the disease. The other point is before the visit, should the visitor and the person visited actually be tested? **As was mentioned in Bishop Susan’s remarks, we don’t have all the data yet as to when full immunity is achieved, and whether or not there can be random spread of the virus even if immunized. We hope to have the data on that in four to six weeks. Testing is a “snapshot” of a given time period, so that alone may not be sufficient. That said, we **strongly suggest** that all who are going to do such visitations be vaccinated.**

I would like to offer a suggestion that when the communicant takes the wafer he remains masked and to take it back to their seat for consuming. In the video the communicant received, spoke, and consumed over the visitor's exposed wafer without his mask on. That seems to be a spreading opportunity. **A good catch. Thanks for the recommendation – it’s wise.**

I would like to offer a suggestion that when the communicant takes the wafer he remains masked and to take it back to their seat for consuming. In the video the communicant received, spoke, and consumed over the visitor's exposed wafer without his mask on. That seems to be a spreading opportunity. **No. Could this kind of Eucharistic visit be done at the church building or on the church grounds? It could, but it opens up the challenge of “if we can do this, why not the other thing we want?”**

I know ashes-to-go is not permitted. When we record our service, can all 4 priests be included in the service, and can we impose ashes on each other, or do we need to self-impose? **You couldn’t impose**

and keep a six feet distance. Please self-impose. Just a reminder, too that you don't have to get "special" ashes – any kind will do, even from your fireplace.

My personal physician explained to me that testing is somewhat limited in terms of safety. It's a snapshot in time. By the time someone receives the results of a test, they may, in fact, have picked up the disease and no longer be 'safe.' I continue to be reluctant to assume I am 'safe' from spreading this disease just because I got a negative test result within a few days. **A wise reminder. No one should be forced to do it.**

I petitioned for our parish to be added as an organization where an essential worker is employed, listing myself, as priest-in-charge as the only employee. I am over 65. I filed yesterday and quickly received an appointment. **It varies from health district to health district. Check with your health district.**

Can we set out ashes for people to pick up? **Yes, as long as you've made sure you used gloves when you bagged them up.**

What about gloves? **Per the advice of our consulting epidemiologist, they don't need to be used at the liturgy itself, but you MUST use them along with masks when you prepare the kits.**

We're mailing ashes to our parishioners. Acceptable? **Yes.**

**A final thought from Bishop Taylor:** In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity – John XXIII

Bishop Jennifer Brooke-Davidson closed the gathering in prayer.

Please note that if you have ideas on topics for these clergy webinars, or suggestions on how to make things better, please do convey them to Mark Eastham at [meastham@thediocese.net](mailto:meastham@thediocese.net).