



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA

**Clergy Call**  
**August 10, 2021**

**Bishop Goff's Remarks**

*(Q & A appears below Bishop's remarks)*

The Delta variant of the Coronavirus.

You have likely been following the news of the Delta variant of the Coronavirus as closely as I have. We hoped and believed that we would be in a different place in the trajectory of the virus, and yet the current news is challenging and frightening.

In some parts of the country, hospitals and intensive care units are again at capacity. Non-essential surgeries are cancelled so that all care can go to coronavirus patients.

People who are seriously ill and dying are on average younger now that they were at the beginning of the pandemic.

The overwhelming majority of those who are seriously ill or who have died are unvaccinated.

Break-through infections among those who are vaccinated are occurring at a higher rate than anticipated.

People who are vaccinated can be infected and spread the virus to others, even if they are asymptomatic.

As long as the virus spreads, it will continue to mutate. There is no way to predict what the next variant will be, and there is reason to anticipate that it will be more virile and contagious. It is possible that the vaccine would not be effective against a new variant. That means that whether we are vaccinated or not, the threats are real.

So what do we do?

Please encourage people to be vaccinated. Epidemiologists tell us that we will get the upper hand in this pandemic only when the vast majority of people are vaccinated.

In addition, I stand by the decisions of last May when I released us all from the guidelines and protocols that had been in place in one form or another since March of 2020. I again thank the teams of clergy leaders who developed the guidelines and worked with congregations in implementing them. Now that we are released from those protocols, decisions about worship and other activities rest with you, with the input of your lay leaders.

To make your best decisions, please –

Regularly check metrics in your county. There are two that are posted for easy access on our diocesan website:

The Brown School of Public Health metric for the [rate of new infections](#) per 100,000 on a seven-day rolling average

The CDC metric for the [rate of transmissibility](#) of the Delta variant.

In effect these two tools gauge the same information in modestly different ways.

If one or both metrics are in the orange zone or above, please ask your people to be masked indoors until the rates come down again to the green or yellow zones.

If one or both are in the red zone, please adjust all indoor activities. Some of you with numbers in the red zone have suspended in-person worship and returned to zoom or other electronic platforms only. Others have reinstated physical distancing in the worship space. Protection of our people and of all God's people, especially the most vulnerable, remains tantamount.

Links to both of these metrics are right at the top of the coronavirus page on the diocesan website, so you can access them quickly and easily.

### **What about the workplace?**

Most of your diocesan staff resumed work in person at Mayo House in June. Last week, recognizing that Richmond is in the High or red zone for transmissibility, we regrouped. Staff now have the option of coming to Mayo House or working from home through Labor Day. We will reassess at the end of the month and make the next decision for moving forward. We require masking in all public places and whenever two or more people are in the same room.

**What about schools or preschools?**

Please stay in touch with your local school district leadership and with the other schools in your area and make your best decision. Remember that children under the age of 12 cannot be vaccinated and are vulnerable, so take every precaution to protect their lives and their health.

**What about singing in church?**

Given the high transmission rate of the Delta variant through aerosol droplets, it makes sense to return to refraining from congregational singing for the time being.

**What about distributing communion?**

The science still demonstrates that drinking from a common cup puts people at risk of infection. I ask you to refrain from the common cup for this season, and I support you in exploring other ways to share the wine of communion.

**What about the Diocesan Day of Commitment in September, the clergy conference at Shrine Mont in October and Diocesan Convention in November?**

At this point, we are continuing to plan these gatherings as in-person events. And we are also developing parallel plans in case being in person is not wise or safe. We are tracking numbers and experiences carefully regarding other diocesan gatherings that are scheduled for the next few months.

I begin three weeks of vacation at the close of the work day today. [Canon Abbott Bailey](#) will serve as my representative and point person in all matters related to the coronavirus.

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**Q and A**

*Do you have advice on formation activities? Children in Godly Play, for example? Masks required?*

If children or adults are gathering indoors, everyone needs to be masked whether vaccinated or not. Also, be attentive to air flow. Be attentive to numbers of people, so they are not crowded together. If the numbers are high in your area, talk to parents about their comfort level with gatherings for youth.

*Could the September 18 Day of Commitment be held outdoors?*

Possibly.

*Could we offer hybrid gatherings, especially for Diocesan Convention?*

We're exploring that. Member of your diocesan staff are visiting the Marriott Hotel in Crystal City on Sept. 1 to discuss various event logistics. Among many other things, they'll try to determine if a hybrid meeting is feasible. We need to know what technology and equipment would be required. A particularly difficult issue is voting in a hybrid meeting. It might be difficult to do that this year. But we are looking into it.

*Regarding wine at Eucharist, are you asking us not to use common cup, but leaving it up to us?*

*Or are you telling us not to use the common cup?*

I am urging you in the strongest possible terms I can to not use the common cup. I am not forbidding it. But I am urging you not to for the sake of the health of all of our people.

*Are the Eucharistic Visitation guidelines still in effect?*

You have been released from those guidelines. The [guidelines](#) may give you ideas for how to offer Eucharist, but they are not binding.

*Do you have thoughts about parish retreats at Shrine Mont? Shenandoah County is red right now.*

I was at Shrine Mont two weeks ago masked and distanced. I felt safe. Shrine Mont is doing a really good job of keeping people safe. They are open and have made significant adjustments, including in food service. If you choose to go, it's my expectation that you will be safe, but know that it will look and feel different.

*Can you clarify the difference between the Brown metrics and the CDC tracker metrics?*

They are tracking different pieces of the same picture, which is why I suggest looking at both.

*When do you anticipate making a decision about shifting Clergy Conference and Annual Convention to virtual gatherings?*

Clergy Conference will be determined by first half of September and Convention by early October.

*Is there any new CDC guidance about masking outdoors? Not to our knowledge. All masking recommendations refer to indoors currently.*