



From the Bishop

The Right Reverend Cathleen Chittenden Bascom
Tenth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas

May 20, 2021

Dearly Beloved of the Diocese of Kansas:

For more than 15 months, together we have worked diligently, carefully and faithfully to keep our people and our parishes safe from Covid-19 by restricting much of normal parish life. Because of vaccines, which have resulted in falling virus rates in our counties, we are entering a time when those previous safety restrictions can be relaxed.

I believe that getting the vaccine is one of the most loving actions we can take – for ourselves, for our neighbors and for the health of our communities – so I urge everyone to get vaccinated as soon as they can, knowing that vaccines are not yet authorized for children younger than 15. So if you already are vaccinated, thank you!

What I offer here becomes the guidance for our diocese going forward. It offers broad guidelines to be implemented in local contexts, trusting parish clergy and lay leaders to make decisions for what is best for all their members.

To empower local discretion, we are limiting our requirements to four items:

- In line with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fully vaccinated people may remove their masks inside. *
- As you are able, allow space for socially distanced seating for those who choose.
- Communion may be distributed in the form of consecrated bread only; for now, the common cup (drinking and intinction) remains prohibited. We will continue to watch for new developments about the safety of the common cup.
- Registration, sign-ups or attendance records must continue to be used and records kept for one month.

***A word about children**

Young members of our churches currently are not eligible to receive a vaccine, and thus they continue to be at risk. The best way we can support families right now is by modeling correct and consistent mask use, so our youngest members can see the care and loving support of their church elders.

For example, mask use and social distancing will continue to be required at Episcopal Summer Camp in June.

Support for local parish decisions

The 44 churches of our diocese vary in many ways – numbers of people, the ages of members and the location. How each one gathers for worship and other activities likewise will vary. **I will fully support clergy and lay leaders in making decisions for their parish**, so long as those decisions are mindful of the four above required items. Of course, we also continue to be guided by the canons and guidance provided by local public health officials.

I encourage parish leadership to be in conversation with parents of young children to create opportunities for formation and worship. In some churches, a good option may be to offer one service where masks are worn by all until there is a vaccination available for children. For others, where children aren't normally present, it may be helpful to have masks available for times when children do attend.

Whatever decisions parish leaders make that are best for their congregation, be sure to communicate those decisions in advance, so parents and families can make appropriate decisions about church attendance.

Continue to be mindful of those who are unable or unwilling to gather in person for worship, meetings, classes, Sunday school or youth group. Consider making these things available online or in a hybrid format.

The weekly Covid report will continue, but review no longer is required

Having passed 11 or more weeks of lower incidence and test positivity in every county of our diocese, parish leaders no longer are required to check the online diocesan Covid report metrics every week.

The diocesan staff will continue to gather public health metrics, including county vaccination rates, and put them into the online spreadsheet (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1M4AdBvYp2qfoD-JAmrrRL1bhmZ6f1_vhy-6rjhpqkbQ/) to help you in your discernment.

If either metric goes "above the line," Canon Patrick Funston will reach out to parish leadership to make them aware. Should a county cross both lines, in-person worship must be postponed in that county until community spread goes down.