

Friday, May 14, 2021

Dear Friends,

Yesterday's CDC announcement comes as a relief to many of us. With a few exceptions, fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks or maintain social distance outdoors or indoors. The few exceptions outlined by the CDC do not include churches.

Accordingly, masks and social distancing are no longer required for those who are fully vaccinated in worship, study, or fellowship settings in our congregations. Those who are not yet vaccinated should continue wearing masks and observing social distancing for their own protection and to prevent infecting other unvaccinated persons. Congregations will not verify anyone's vaccination status.

Because many of our young people have only recently been given access to the vaccine, I am implementing interim measures to continue to protect them until full vaccination could reasonably have been achieved. Independence Day will mark our pivot to the full lifting of pandemic restrictions barring unforeseen setbacks. Below is an outline of these interim guidelines.

For the Holy Eucharist: We may now return to the altar rail to receive communion. We will receive the wine by intinction until Independence Day. A customary passing of the Peace will resume on Independence Day.

Sanitation: Return now to normal sanitation practices and keep hand sanitizer available. Surfaces have not been shown to spread the virus.

Social Gatherings: Coffee hour and receptions may now resume indoors and out. Potluck meals and other gatherings with a sit-down meal will resume on Independence Day.

Children's and Youth Christian Formation: For now follow the guidance provided by the state for schools when inside and outside.

Singing: For the fully vaccinated, congregational and choral singing without masks and distancing is allowed. Others should wear masks and observe distance until Independence Day.

As always, local variations are permissible. Each congregation exists in its own ministry context. Depending upon local conditions and the health of those involved, clergy and lay leadership may require continued mask wearing and social distancing.

We are aiming for Independence Day as our Pivot Day to the new normal. Unforeseen developments can change this, but optimism is called for. We have learned much about building virtual community, discovered new ministries, and recognized that some ministries have run their course. Now it's time to apply this learning to plans for Rally Day as well as for a full Program and Liturgical Year.

Faithfully in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Jacob W. Owensby, PhD, DD
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