



January 5, 2022

The Episcopal Diocese of Utah

The Rt. Rev. Scott B. Hayashi

Dear People of The Episcopal Diocese of Utah:

Many of us were glad to see an end to 2021. We hope and pray that 2022 will be better. I had intended to send a pastoral letter to you in early December when it looked like we were moving toward Covid becoming endemic rather than pandemic. I had it almost finished. Then the alert was sounded about a new variant - Omicron. I postponed the letter until there was more information.

We know, with complete certainty, that the Omicron variant is highly contagious and that it is readily infecting people regardless of vaccination status. It is also clear that people who have been vaccinated are less likely to be hospitalized or to die from the virus than those who are not vaccinated. Please do get vaccinated if you have not. The Episcopal Church has no religious restrictions or exemptions regarding receiving the vaccines for Covid-19.

The impact of the recent surge of cases has resulted in hospitals being filled to capacity, healthcare workers reaching their breaking points, the cancellation of thousands of airline flights at the busiest travel time, and industry after industry reporting being understaffed because of workers getting sick.

In the midst of this, people safely masked, gathered together to sing Christmas hymns, pray, listen to the story of the birth of Jesus and receive Holy Communion. While not the same as it was in 2019, it was, for me, more deeply moving and spiritual. There was a seriousness to the celebration. It was a defiant shout that proclaimed to the darkness of our time that the LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD AND THE DARKNESS CANNOT OVERCOME IT.

I do believe that the Covid pandemic will recede and become endemic like the flu and other viruses. I cannot predict when that will happen. I hope it will be soon. Until then, the protocols for worship and church gatherings that I set in August will remain, with the exception regarding the prohibition of the use of the Common Cup. Research has shown that the virus is most spread via aerosol. A person lowering his or her face mask, taking a sip from the cup and returning the mask over the mouth and nose has not shown to be a means by which Covid has spread. The decision about the use of the Common Cup is not a mandate. The clergy in charge is empowered to make the decision regarding whether or not it will be offered. If offered, a person may choose to not receive from the cup. This has been true at all times. Communion is complete with only the bread.

As we look forward to our Diocesan Convention and the Special Electing Convention for your next bishop, at the end of April, we fully intend to meet in person. For the safety of all of us, I will require that all delegates for these events will need to be vaccinated to attend. Please continue to pray for our Nominating and Transition Committee Members and for those in discernment for being the Twelfth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah. I thank you all for your perseverance and offer all the Blessings of the Lord as we move into this year, both with transitions in the Diocese and in continuing to proclaim God's love and mercy in the period of a pandemic. Remember, God is good...All the time...God is good!

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "The Rt. Rev. Scott B. Hayashi".