



Diocese of Utah

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
75 South 200 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

March 1, 2022 - Shrove Tuesday

Dear People of The Episcopal Diocese of Utah:

As your Bishop, one of my greatest responsibilities has been to pray and to follow science and monitor the nation's top medical authorities to keep our congregations, our clergy, and all who are part of our ministries as safe as possible from COVID-19. There have been major developments that have now changed many recommendations and Bishop policies that have been the basis of how we have lived, worshiped, and ministered these past two years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated their guidance for limiting the spread of COVID-19 regarding the wearing of masks. The "CDC looks at the combination of three metrics — new COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population in the past 7 days, the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and total new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population in the past 7 days — to determine the COVID-19 community level. New COVID-19 admissions and the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied represent the current potential for strain on the health system. Data on new cases acts as an early warning indicator of potential increases in health system strain in the event of a COVID-19 surge. Using these data, the COVID-19 community level is classified as low, medium, or high." (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>. This link can be used to find the community classification for your county.) All of the congregations of The Episcopal Diocese of Utah are located in counties that are classified as either low or medium.

Going forward, unless a new severe variant arises and the vaccines provide no safety against it or *the county in which the congregation resides returns to a "high" classification*, the requirement for wearing of masks for all indoor activities will be optional. This applies to worship, meetings, coffee hours, fellowship dinners and all other indoor activities. The clergy in charge of the congregation, in conversation with the vestry or bishop's committee, shall determine when and to what degree the COVID-19 protocols that I previously set for our diocese will be relaxed.

The streaming of worship should continue to be offered for people who choose not to attend in person because they are immunocompromised or uncomfortable with attending in person.

People who are feeling ill should remain at home. COVID-19 has not disappeared and still remains a threat to us. If a person who attends worship or an event at church falls ill with COVID-19 following being at church, then the cleric of the congregation should be notified in order that people may be alerted to the possibility of having been exposed to the virus. The guidance from the CDC regarding isolation / quarantine if exposed to the virus can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>.

My recommendation is to go slowly in moving back to indoor worship and activities. I suggest starting the relaxed mask and social distance guidelines in meetings or worship first to see how it goes then add in coffee hours and fellowship dinners later.

As for me, I shall continue to wear a mask for my visitations. The reason is that I do not want to catch or spread the virus and because if I do come down with COVID, then my visitations will cease until I have completed the time for quarantine / isolation. If I were a cleric in charge of a congregation, I would do the same as catching the virus would result in not being present to celebrate Holy Eucharist for the duration of the quarantine / isolation period.

We have been through a very difficult time with the pandemic. While it is not yet completely over, I am glad that we are making progress and I pray that this will continue. Finally, thank you, thank you, thank you for your perseverance during these last two years. God bless us and keep all of us in the very heart of our all loving Creator.

Faithfully,

+ Scott D. Haglund