

A Message from the Diocesan Standing Committee Regarding COVID Guidelines

On Tuesday, June 15th, the Governor announced that New York State had reached the 70% vaccination mark among adults and was therefore lifting most guidelines that had been put in place. Like most New Yorkers, we were thankful for this news and pray that COVID-19 becomes a memory of the past and not a concern of the future. With that being said, the Standing Committee is prepared to move toward normal with caution. **We are lifting all diocesan restrictions for churches; however, we fully support any Rector, Priest-in-Charge or Vicar who chooses to keep some or all of the regulations in place.**

Not only is our diocese spread out geographically, but the parishes vary greatly in size. We believe that the clergy in charge of each parish know of their own unique situation, the make-up of their congregations, the space and set-up of their buildings and the health concerns of individuals, thus they have the authority to make the best decisions for their local context. We advise consultation with other church leaders as decisions are being made.

While many of us are excited to get back to "normal", it may be advisable to take a phased-in approach to removing restrictions and guidelines. In particular, we ask that you prayerfully take into consideration the best way to move forward in regards to the following areas (not an exhaustive list):

- The unvaccinated, including children under 12
- The immuno-compromised and vulnerable
- The reception of the common cup
- Social distancing and capacity limits
- The passing of the peace and the offertory plate
- The handling of events and gatherings with food
- Continued encouragement for those who are ill to stay home

As Christians, we should be showing kindness and understanding in all circumstances and seeking ways in which we can grow in unity and love. This includes to those who may have a different opinion on how to handle the further opening up of our churches. We must continue to keep in mind those who, for whatever reason, are not vaccinated; those who choose to wear a mask; those who have serious health conditions; and those who have lost a friend or loved one because of the virus. In our freedom to come out from under the regulations, we must continue to love and respect those who may choose to wear masks or follow other safety precautions.

We thank you for your cooperation during the pandemic, we know it wasn't easy.

May God be with you all as you continue to grow in his grace and love. May he continue to be with those still suffering with loss, and those still fighting the virus both here and around the world.

Faithfully Yours In Christ,
The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany