January 29, 2021

Grace to you, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

As vaccines begin to roll out and infections decrease, we can look forward to gathering indoors in greater numbers. There is light at the end of the tunnel, but we must remain vigilant a little longer. These recommendations make use of data from the Kentucky Department of Public Health. You can find this information at KY Covid and further useful news at Covid Act Now.

Although most counties in the Diocese are still in the critical stage, numbers have steadily decreased this week. Nonetheless, we continue to recommend that if your county is at the Red (critical) level, you limit indoor gatherings to 10 or fewer people, taking all recommended precautions. The critical level is not the time to experiment.

If your county moves to the Orange (at risk) level, you may increase the number of participants with proper care. At this level, we recommend that you restrict numbers to 25% of building capacity or the number of people able to gather and keep at least 6’ distance from one another. Please use the lesser of these two calculations. For instance, if your building seats 200 people, 25% of 200 is 50. However, when measuring 6’ from each position, you might calculate that only 25 - 40 people can safely be seated (depending on how many are in a family pod). You would choose the lesser number, i.e., 25 - 40.

The Yellow (slow growth) level allows us to increase participation by another 50% from the previous level. In our example above, if you allowed 25 - 40 at the Orange level, you may now admit 37 - 60 people.

The Green (containment) level means we can return to building capacity. All of these recommendations assume you continue to wear masks, wash hands, keep a distance, clean the building, and follow other CDC and A Way Forward diocesan guidelines.

We are exploring when it will be possible to begin choral and congregational singing with other dioceses and will give you a recommendation when we have greater clarity. For now, you should continue to refrain from choral and congregational singing indoors.
Also, we are still asking you to offer communion in only one kind (bread wafers). Although there have been several good proposals on ways to safely offer ‘the cup’, we would prefer not to complicate the process now and leave this for a later season. As Anglicans, we believe that Communion in one kind is full participation in the Eucharist, even as we long for the opportunity to share more abundantly.

After a thorough discussion with the Liturgical Commission and interested clergy on pastoral matters concerning the distribution of communion, I would like to offer you some clarity and greater flexibility.

Communion by mail and drive-by communion, while well meant, are not possible. They fall too far outside the practices of the Episcopal Church for the celebration of Eucharist. They may also have the unintended effect of trivializing the sacrament. The more we try to make things feel normal when they are not, the more isolated and lonely we are likely to feel.

The question of Virtual Communion has also been raised. This entails a priest celebrating the eucharist remotely, while people at home gather before their computer screens with bread and wine. There are well-articulated cases to be made for these services, however, I am uncomfortable with this approach and ask you not to make use of it. Rather, I urge you to continue exploring the many other ways we can pray within our tradition that promote meaningful practices for individuals and families at home. You are all doing an amazing job!

There have also been some creative and carefully thought-out suggestions on how to distribute communion that balance the requirements of the Prayer Book and the current pastoral need. A pandemic certainly seems to qualify for Communion under Special Circumstances (BCP p. 396), as long as we endeavor to connect individuals to the worship of the community. I do not wish to legislate (other than the three prohibitions above); rather, I would remind us of the rich variety of Anglican worship, ask for your continued perseverance and rely on your sound judgment. You are responsible leaders who know your local context. Follow the guidelines and when you have a creative idea, talk it through with your colleagues at your regional chapter before launching ahead.

I pray for you daily and appreciate the balancing act you must perform. Be of good cheer, the end is near, you have kept your people safely together and we can now begin to look forward in hope.

In Christ,

[Signature]

The Rt. Rev. Mark Van Koevering
Bishop of Lexington
Per The Episcopal Church Canon III.12.3(b) Bishop Mark asks that all Clergy and Wardens in Charge share this Pastoral Letter with their faith communities.

BE THE CHURCH
BE THE CHANGE