

New COVID Response Directives
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
Swanton, Vermont
March 18th, 2022

Wisdom suggests gradual implementation of those things for which we have fasted over the last two years. Below you will find a week by week lessening of COVID restrictions.

Step 1, effective March 20th:

- Hybrid worship will continue in perpetuity as a viable option for worshippers.
- A separate section is designated as mandatory social distanced and masked (N95 or KN95), to the right back of the church as facing from the altar; for those who feel safer in such a section and for those who are immunocompromised.
- The air purifiers must remain in use in perpetuity for air purification. Use of the parish hall will also mean, if we do not purchase more units, the moving and then replacing them back in the church, using at least two units for most spaces used, but 4 units (per our professional evaluation) for the parish Hall.
- Persons who are unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated, we suggest that you continue to mask and social distance for your safety.
- Masks and social distancing will be optional. But masks & social distancing will continue to be an option for any who feel more comfortable with them, and no one should feel uncomfortable or experience any sense of disapproval for choosing to wear a mask or social distance. Please honor their choice and space.
- Persons with any cold like, flu type, stomach issues, etc...with symptoms, or positive COVID test when used, should refrain from attendance and instead choose the virtual options.

- DHOs (Designated Health Officers) role will be lightened. They will monitor the mandatory section for masking and social distancing and other “on call” needs.
- We are asking that crossing the aisle and hugging for The Peace not resume but continue a kind gesture toward our neighbors as we have been doing. Of course, families and safe pods may greet in closer fashions as deemed appropriate.
- Communion with “TrueVine” chalices will continue for now or in one kind (bread only). The Vestry and I will discuss the use of the common chalice and altar rail use for future implementation. We will continue to come forward one at a time or by family pod. This has worked marvelously.

Step 2, effective March 27th:

- Offering plates may once again be passed as before COVID changes. And oblations (bread and time) may be presented each Sunday.
- Coffee hour will resume in the parish hall.
- Commissions may resume with in person meetings following the precautions listed in this document.

Step 3, effective April 3rd:

- Inside parish groups can resume scheduling use of the parish hall and facilities, and outside groups as they are vetted, as per usual, thru the Rector. Large groups from the outside for meals with the parish, because of unknown vaccination status, should still participate in carry out meals and the like for now, or eat outside. With respect to those preparing and serving meals for others, we strongly recommend that they wear masks and observe social distancing to the extent possible.
- Nurse attendants/ adults must be vaccinated & masked.

Step 4, effective April 10th:

- Full choir singing may resume without masks/ optional.

Step 5, Fall 2022:

- Youth Christian Formation will resume.

Please note:

- **Holy Trinity supports local, state, and national health guidance regarding vaccination.**
- **Should cases spike again in our area, the Rector and Vestry reserve the right to strengthen safety precautions.**

The above was formulated, approved by the vestry, with our parish as focus, after the following was received by Fr. Rob from the Diocese of Vermont COVID Response Team on March 16th, 2022:

March 2022

Dear Members of the Diocese of Vermont,

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” - *Galatians 6:2*

Throughout the pandemic we have been guided by our theology of the Body - that in Jesus Christ we are one Body, called to work together in love and care for all, especially the most vulnerable in our midst. This continues to be our priority even as pandemic restrictions are reduced or removed in our part of God’s world.

As we gather in Lent Covid-19 rates and hospitalizations are falling in Vermont. We encourage congregations to institute practices of hospitality, generosity, and inclusion that will work best in their situations to meet the needs of their clergy, members, and visitors. Communicate decisions clearly, making changes in sensibly-timed roll outs. Always remember, there are vulnerable people within our membership, including young children, as well as in our communities, and it is out of Christian love that we seek to make sure everyone is included in safe ways.

- We strongly encourage continuing “hybrid” worship if possible. We know now that many people want to part of Sunday church but for whatever reasons cannot attend in-person. Hybrid worship is valid and valuable, and we recommend that congregations continue to offer it.
- We continue to expect full, boosted vaccination of everyone for whom a vaccine is available, except those few for whom vaccination may not be medically advised.

- Masks can still be used, especially higher quality masks (such as N95). Wearing masks, and seeing others wear them, can be particularly reassuring for those who are at higher risk, immune-compromised, or live with someone who is. Because we often sing during services, masks are helpful in this regard as well. Clergy and congregations should make wise decisions regarding masking in light of their own situations.
- Physical distancing during worship can continue, although distancing can be adjusted as local situations might allow.
- Ventilation remains a high priority. This is a “passive” measure that can be put in place and help reduce risks for all. Air filtration systems, portable air filtering machines, and even open windows and fans when the weather permits, will benefit everyone.
- “Coffee Hour” and meal programs may resume, but please be aware of keeping all as safe as possible by taking risk reducing measures and making these activities accessible for all who wish to participate, including those at higher risk. Establish prudent local guidelines, and please respect and honor without derision the decision of anyone, whether clergy or lay, who chooses not to participate in these activities. With respect to those preparing and serving meals for others, we strongly recommend that they wear masks and observe social distancing to the extent possible.
- Please be aware that we cannot declare an “All Clear” with regard to COVID 19. While we have reached a level where risks are reduced for many, they are not reduced for all, and COVID 19 is still present. Remember, please, that infection rates in your part of Vermont may be different (perhaps higher) than in other parts of the State; greater caution should be exercised in places where infection rates are higher at a given time. Furthermore, our situation in Vermont as a whole can change in the future, and we may again need to institute public health safety measures. Don’t throw away your masks yet!
- While the common chalice is a powerful symbol of our unity in Christ to many, some may not yet feel comfortable with a return to its use. Perhaps others are eager for such return. Resuming use of a common chalice should be done with care, only with full consent of the congregation’s clergy, in consultation with the Vestry and others (e.g., worship committee), and with clear communication to all. It is advisable to have alternative methods for administering the consecrated wine available (e.g., True Vine Communion kits or other individual containers). Congregations should be reminded that Communion in one kind (bread) is fully valid, as is Communion by Communion kits or their equivalent.

We hope this guidance is helpful as congregations make wise pastoral and practical decisions. We are thankful for everyone’s thoughtfulness and forbearance during these past two years of the pandemic. We remain available to help with any further questions or information any may need. Please be in touch through the Covid Response Team’s convener, The Rev. Fred Moser (fredmoser@trinityshelburne.org). May God bless all as we look forward to Holy Week and Easter, knowing that Christ calls us to bear each other’s burdens as we serve Jesus’ way of love in the new day before us.

Faithfully,

The Covid Response Team of the Diocese of Vermont

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