



St. Mary's Episcopal Church

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Friday in the Fourth Week of Easter; April 30, 2021

Dear St. Mary's Parish Family,

I'm glad that conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic in our area have changed such that I am able to write this letter to you. As a result of an increased number of adults who have received a vaccine and an overall decrease in COVID-19 cases, Governor Cooper's latest Executive Order (#209) loosens some pandemic-related restrictions and goes into effect today. Bishop Skirving has offered updated guidelines for public worship that follow these measures. I have consulted with our Wardens (Stuart Stroud & Jimmy Ballard), and we are in agreement that St. Mary's will adopt the loosening of these pandemic-related restrictions and offer the following summary:

- Outdoor Worship – Masks are no longer required for outdoor gatherings or other outdoor activities. (Section 1.3 of the Executive Order) In keeping with Section 1.5, however, we continue to recommend maintaining 6 feet of spacing between households and encourage those who have not yet been fully vaccinated to wear a mask when they cannot maintain this distance. Of course, anyone who wishes to wear a mask may do so. Eucharistic ministers will be masked during communion.
- Indoor Worship – This new order offers no change in capacities for indoor worship. (Section 3.9.c) Masks are still to be worn for public indoor gatherings. (Section 1.3)
- Singing – For now, singing will be limited to soloists and small ensembles, both indoors and outdoors, in keeping with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services document titled “Interim Guidance for Places of Worship and Religious Services (03/26/2021).”

Additionally, leaders in the Vestry and the Worship Committee have worked with me to make the decision to return to outdoor worship for the 9:30am liturgy on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month, beginning in May and continuing until announced otherwise. In the event of inclement weather, the 9:30am liturgy will be held indoors. The 8am liturgy will continue to be held in the Chapel and we will also continue to provide an online liturgy posted to our [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

Since it has likely been a while, please take a moment to re-read the rest of our guidelines for in-person worship below. I thank you for your continued care and attention to making our times together safe and joyful and I look forward to being with you when the time is right. May God bless you and continue to guide us in wise and loving actions for the sake of the whole world.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

The Rev. Thomas P.H. Warren, Rector

The Starting Point Considerations:

St. Mary's continues to promote and affirm the following general steps for social distancing and reduction of transmission of the COVID-19 coronavirus for all people:

- Maintain at least six feet of physical distancing between members of different households.
- Wear a face covering indoors.
- Carry and regularly use hand sanitizer.
- Frequently wash hands using soap and water.
- Regularly clean all high touch surfaces.
- Stay at home if sick.

Any person described as a [“high-risk individual” with respect to COVID-19 impact](#) is encouraged to stay at home rather than risk any chance of infection. Digital resources for worship from home will continue to be offered through our [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) platforms.

Gatherings that are hosted at St. Mary's will seek to minimize the amount of surfaces and materials that can be touched (altar rail, pew books, collection plates, etc.). Practices that necessitate coming within 6-ft of one another will be minimized or modified.

Occupancy, Seating, & Reservations

- For outdoor liturgies, worshippers are asked to bring their own seating (chairs, blankets, etc.).
- For outdoor liturgies, please only park in the spaces nearest the West Lawn driveway if you plan to remain in your vehicle during the service.
- Worshippers of different households must sit and remain at least 6-ft apart at all times.
- For indoor liturgies, not every pew will be available for seating. Those pews that are available will be clearly marked.
- Given the 6-ft radius between different households we anticipate the following pew capacities:
 - Chapel - 1 household per pew
 - Nave (center pews) - 1 household may sit at either end of pew if each household consists of 1 or 2 individuals. Larger households would likely not be able to share the pew with others.
 - Transepts (side pews) - Single-person households may sit at either end of pew. If a household has 2 or more individuals, no other household would likely be able to share the pew.
 - Balcony - 1 single-person household may sit at either end of pew. If a household has 2 or more individuals, no other household would likely be able to share the pew.
- Overflow seating will be in Moseley Hall with the audio (and hopefully video as well) made available.

Preparations and Arrival/Departure for Indoor Worship

- For indoor liturgies, all pews reserved for seating and other high-touch surfaces will be disinfected by the St. Mary's cleaning staff on Friday and the sanctuaries will be locked until Sunday morning services. The Altar Guild will disinfect any other worship vessels that are brought out for use.
- Pew books will be removed from the pews until further notice. Worshippers are encouraged to BYOBible and BYOBookOfCommonPrayer!
- Hand sanitizer and face coverings will be available for worshippers as they arrive for worship. ***All worshippers are required to wear face coverings properly for indoor worship.***
- Greeters and Ushers will be outdoors near the Narthex (weather permitting) in order to discourage congregating inside the Narthex. As with the outdoor liturgies, conversation and gathering should only take place outdoors where safe physical distancing may be observed.

- To reduce touching door handles and to increase outdoor air flow, the Narthex and outside doors should remain open as much as is reasonable.
- Bathrooms will be open, but are to be single-occupancy.
- Until further notice, coffee hours and receptions will not be made available following worship.

Other Liturgical Considerations

- Efforts will be made to minimize the number of speakers using the same microphone/lectern/pulpit.
- Since singing produces an especially widespread aerosol even when face coverings are used, congregational singing continues to be suspended at this time. Instrumental music and singing by a soloist/small ensemble will continue to be offered at the 9:30am liturgy.
- An alms basin will be made available in the Narthex, on the table as worshippers enter/exit. Collection plates will not be passed throughout the congregation.
- The Altar party will generally consist of clergy, a crucifer, and two torchbearers.

Eucharist

- Following current diocesan guidelines, the Holy Eucharist will continue to be offered in “one kind” (bread) only. Some wine will be consecrated, but the common cup will not be shared. The Episcopal Church and Anglican Tradition have consistently taught that Christ is fully present in the bread and fully present in the wine of communion. To receive in "one kind" is not to receive "half communion" and has been a common practice for a variety of reasons in extraordinary times.
- For those who would prefer to not receive the bread at Eucharist, a prayer for Spiritual Communion will be included in the bulletin.
- The Clergy will wash hands before the liturgy and use hand sanitizer immediately before and after the Eucharistic Prayer and distribution of communion. The communion bread will be placed discreetly into the hands of each communicant, being careful to avoid touching hands. A sanitizing wipe will be carried by Eucharistic ministers during the distribution in case contact is made.
- Those who wish to receive the bread will be asked to stand at the time of distribution so that it is known where the communion bread should be taken. Several medical professionals of our community have recommended that bringing the Eucharist to worshippers (rather than worshippers coming to a communion station) is the safest option at this time.
- Communicants should adjust face coverings to consume the bread only after they are 6-ft away from others outside their household again.