



## St. Mary's Episcopal Church

800 Rountree Street  
Kinston, North Carolina 28501-3655  
[www.stmaryskinston.com](http://www.stmaryskinston.com)

Telephone: (252) 523-6146

Fax: (252) 523-5134

The Friday after Pentecost; May 28, 2021

Dear St. Mary's Parish Family,

Fourteen months ago, out of an abundance of compassion, we began to respond to the emerging reality that the COVID-19 pandemic was reaching our part of the world. None of us knew how close to our families, homes, or neighbors it would come. None of us knew how long the effects of the pandemic would be with us. None of us knew what sort of protective measures or treatments would come to be. Even so, we maintained that the Christian faith is marked by hope - a certainty of things yet unseen - and among those certainties is that God is present in the midst of every hardship and will bring about Good News.

Today, thanks be to God, I write with joyful news that signifies a remarkable shift for our common lives together. While the pandemic is not over and we continue to pray for all who are impacted by this disease that currently hospitalizes 694 adults in our state, the CDC has reported that vaccination efforts are proving to be very effective and our Governor's [latest Executive Order](#) removes most pandemic-related restrictions. Earlier this week, [Bishop Skirving offered updated guidance for public worship](#) in the Diocese of East Carolina, and I am so glad to offer the following guidelines regarding in-person gatherings at St. Mary's, having consulted with our Wardens, Worship Committee, and medical professionals among our community:

1. All social distancing requirements are lifted at St. Mary's Church.
2. With regard to the need for face coverings, the familiar Anglican phrase regarding private confession applies: **All may, some should, none must.**
  - a. **All may wear a face covering.** Each of us will have a different comfort level about being with others in public. Those gathering for public worship should feel welcome to wear a face covering if they prefer to do so. Some may choose to wear a face covering when they cannot maintain a certain physical distance from others.
  - b. **Some should wear a face covering.** The CDC recommends that all persons over age two who are not vaccinated should wear a face covering indoors when other people are present. This applies to children who are too young to be vaccinated, those who cannot be vaccinated, and those who have not chosen to be vaccinated.
  - c. **None must wear a face covering.** In this sense, we are following our Governor's most recent Executive Order. But we can certainly hope that all who should wear a face covering will do so.

3. Singing is once again to be celebrated as a part of congregational worship at St. Mary's! I invite you all to wholeheartedly lift a joyful noise the next time you have the opportunity. I can't wait to hear you!! Musicians, of course, are afforded the same choices as others present, with regards to distancing and face coverings. If there is a favorite hymn that you've especially missed singing, please tell our Organist, Sharon Veitch, or the co-chairs of the Music Task Group: Pam Mazingo & Bonnie Holton.
4. The Eucharist will return to being offered at the altar rail, while it will continue to be brought to any person who desires it in the pews when such a desire is shared with an usher. At this time, we will continue to offer only bread at communion, per diocesan guidance. Before too much more time passes, the diocese will develop and distribute recommendations for how to most safely share wine during communion.
5. There are other elements of worship at St. Mary's that have historically been part of local practice and preference which will continue to be discerned with respect to if, when, and how to be reintroduced to our corporate worship.
6. We will continue to offer weekly online liturgies, as has become our practice, posting them to our [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#).
7. Beginning June 13, two fully-staffed nurseries will resume operation: one for infants and one for older children. The nurseries will be open every Sunday from 9-11am until further notice. The church's Nursery Guidelines will continue to reflect current COVID protocols, guided by the NC Department of Health & Human Services. All adults and volunteers involved in the nurseries and other children's ministries in which the children are too young to be vaccinated are expected to wear a face covering when indoors with the children.
8. We are now able to return to hosting gatherings & receptions with food after worship and at other times. As the Fellowship Committee works through the details of what to offer and when, we will be mindful of considering how to make these activities safer, such as including the provision of individual servings rather than the offering of a potluck meal, per diocesan guidance.

Throughout the pandemic, I have tried to avoid using the phrase "new normal." I am prayerful that these practices and guidelines can appropriately be described as our "current faithful" way of sharing life together. I hope that with increasing health, strength, and wholeness of our community and world, even more opportunities of traveling the Journey in Faith and sharing the Good News of Jesus will emerge for us to embrace fully and with an abundance of joy!

Gratefully yours in Christ,



The Rev. Thomas P.H. Warren, Rector