



The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

The Right Reverend Robert S. Skirving, Bishop

March 24, 2021

Updated Worship Guidelines Diocese of East Carolina Effective March 26, 2021

Friends and Colleagues,

Just in time for our celebrations of Holy Week and Easter, we find ourselves in the situation of being able to consider the possibility of gathering for indoor worship in greater numbers than have been possible during the past year.

With Executive Order No. 204, Governor Roy Cooper has directed that restrictions on businesses and gatherings be further eased, effect at 5pm on Friday, March 26. Here is a link to his Executive Order:

<https://files.nc.gov/governor/documents/files/EO204-Further-Easing-Restrictions.pdf>

Most critically for the congregations of the Diocese of East Carolina, the Executive Order speaks to changes in limits and practices for Movie Theaters and Entertainment Facilities (Section 3.9), Child Care Facilities (Section 3.3), Meeting Centers, Conference Centers, and Reception Venues (Section 3.8) and other situations that might be relevant to the life and ministry of your congregation.

In parallel with the Governor's Executive Order, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has updated their "Interim Guidance for Places of Worship and Religious Services." This document includes much practical information for congregations, and also includes helpful links to resources from the CDC and other organizations. **Most critical for our purposes is that the occupancy limit for indoor in-person worship has been raised to 50% of stated fire capacity.** There continues to be no limit on numbers for outdoor in-person

worship in East Carolina, so long as proper physical spacing is maintained. This very useful document is linked here:

<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/618/download>

Finally, it is worth noting that the May 13, 2020 Guidelines for “Preparing for a Return to Public Worship” is still a critical document for congregations of the Diocese of East Carolina to follow. It speaks of the necessity for clergy and churchwardens to work together in providing congregational leadership for the planning and implementation of public worship, and it speaks of how Holy Eucharist should be celebrated during this ongoing pandemic.

Here is a link to this diocesan resource:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/3279696/Guidelines_for_Public_Worship.pdf

As an increasing number of people are vaccinated it is perfectly natural that many would hope for the removal of restrictions that have become a part of our experience of worship. I most often hear questions about the possibility of a return to congregational singing and a move away from the requirement that participants in worship be masked. With you, I long for a move in these directions but I must emphasize that it is still too soon to change our practices. The documents referenced above are clear, and we must continue to follow the practices they detail. We will continue to monitor the possibility of easing further restrictions in the weeks ahead. For now, I urge you to be patient and to hold firm to the path you have been on.

In whatever ways we will celebrate Holy Week and Easter this year, I hope that we will boldly affirm the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus in keeping to the path God called him to follow, and that we will joyfully affirm the great good news of God’s power over all things including the grave. The path of Jesus is one we are called to follow, and God’s power over death is good news that all need to hear.

May your Holy Week and Easter celebrations be glorious!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.