**Suggestions and Considerations for Resuming Indoor Worship**

As an increasing number of people are vaccinated, the number of cases continues to decline. In accordance with the latest updates from the CDC and the update to our own Diocesan guidelines, we are entering into a new phase of Church life.  The Diocesan Health Committee has been tasked by the Bishop to develop a few principles to help guide churches in discerning how best to adjust their activities and safety measures based on their own particular circumstances (i.e. size of building, availably of outdoor space, demographic profile, etc.). What follows are some suggestions for you to consider. These do not in any way supersede our official protocols but instead offer some ideas as to how you might balance the need for safety with lessening restrictions.

As we begin transitioning to total capacity and full participation, there continues to be the need for each community to establish appropriate safeguards based on its own particular situation. Communities should take into account any pastoral considerations for those who are cautious about gathering in large groups, giving special attention to those not vaccinated - particularly those most vulnerable including children. Obviously, this will look different in our various communities, depending upon the population, demographics, campus and other resources.

One thing is clear: there should continue to be an opportunity for persons to gather in the safest manner possible. As long as there are a significant number of individuals who remain at risk (not vaccinated) then provision should be made for such individuals to worship either virtually or with benefit of masks and social distancing.

A particularly important consideration is the safety of children. At this time, children under 12 are not eligible and many under 16 are still in the process of getting vaccinated. If we want to be welcoming to them and their families, then provision needs to be made for opportunities to gather in a way that ensures their safety. For church school and other activities that focus on children, both children and the adults who care for them should wear masks and maintain social distancing. This may change as more children receive the vaccine and/or the CDC changes its guidelines regarding children.

When planning your in-person activities, it continues to be essential to ask all unvaccinated individuals to mask and distance from those not of their own household. Given that most churches will have a range of vaccinated and unvaccinated people we recommend that for indoor worship a church consider offering at least one liturgy that adheres to social distancing and the wearing of masks. The need for such measures will depend in part upon how many members are at-risk (unvaccinated) as well as how many visitors a church receives. Indoor settings should also give special consideration to singing. If there is to be congregational singing and if vulnerable individuals are present, then you should strongly consider requiring masks for everyone, regardless of vaccination status. Although we wish to take everyone at their word, we know that singing greatly increases the risks of transmission. Thus it is reasonable to require masks of everyone in order to protect the vulnerable. If they are all fully vaccinated, choirs may sing without masks.

For those parishes that are able, providing more than one liturgy, each with its own distinct measures, offers a solution that meets the needs of most, if not all, segments of the church. While it is reasonable to be concerned about creating some sort of a divide among the people, please remember that such measures would be temporary and are meant to be only a transitional step until such time as everyone may safely and more comfortably gather as a single community indoors. Again, discerning what steps are right for your church is a very individual process. If you have questions please contact either the Rev. Rick Vinson at rvinson@trinitysolebury.org or Canon Kirk Berlenbach at kberlenbach@diopa.org.