



The Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes

The Rt. Rev. Mark A. Engel – Bishop

December 21, 2021

Dear Clergy and Wardens,

Greetings in the strong name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Messiah, whose birth we are about to celebrate and herald once again. Terri and I send you our warmest wishes for a happy, healthy celebration of the Christmas season.

I am writing to you today in light of the most recent increase in COVID cases and hospitalizations complicated by the new Omicron variant. We have all hoped that this Christmas might have allowed us to be far less concerned about COVID than last Christmas. Many of us have experienced some measure of “*pandemic fatigue*”. However, this is the reality we face today according to Reuters Covid-19 Tracker: Covid infections are increasing in the U.S. with 144,967 new cases reported daily, which is 58% of the peak reported on January 7, 2020. To date, there have been 51,219,840 confirmed infections and 810,641 covid related deaths.

<https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/united-states/>

I urge you to prayerfully re-assess your current pastoral practices regarding the measures you take to care for the well-being of your congregation. As we celebrate Christmas with additional services and events, let us be diligent to care for all, and especially, the most vulnerable among us. To assist you with your review, the current CDC recommendations can be found here [CDC Holiday Tips](#) and the following diocesan guidelines and pastoral concerns that were issued in May 2021 are still in effect *as informed by your state/local health care directives*.

Masks and Social Distancing

Masks and social distancing are optional but recommended in our services and events for those who are fully vaccinated. Masks and social distancing can also be optional for those who have recovered from COVID-19 for up to three months. After that, please consult your physician. See www.cdc.gov for more information.

Masks and social distancing are recommended and may be requested (but not required) for those who have not been vaccinated, for their own health, and for the health of others, including our children. We ask that all in attendance honor these guidelines, but we will not ask anyone about their vaccination status.

Regular seating may be resumed for those who are fully vaccinated. Those who are not fully vaccinated may opt to sit there at their own risk. A suitable area of socially distanced seating should also be provided for those who are not fully vaccinated or others who choose to sit there.

Hygiene and Cleaning Practices

We recommend that churches continue to implement sound hygiene practices (handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, etc.) and reasonable cleaning practices for the general health of our congregants.

Distribution of Holy Communion

You may choose to continue to distribute in one kind (bread only). Communion may be distributed in both kinds by observing the following directives. Observing careful, sanitary preparation procedures, the wine

- may be distributed in individual cups (purchased pre-sealed or hygienically prepared).
- may be distributed by clergy who intinct the wafer and drop it into the communicant's hand(s).
- may be distributed by previously placing a drop on the wafer prior to the eucharist.

I strongly urge that the wine should NOT be distributed to communicants by having them drink or intinct from a common cup(s). Should you choose to use a common cup(s), you must also provide one of the three methods mentioned above.

Clergy may lead worship without wearing masks. I recommend that all clergy wear masks when in close proximity to others unless they have permission from the bishop (based on a physician's recommendation due to a medical condition) not to do so.

These measures will be regularly reviewed and updated as deemed appropriate.

Pastoral Concerns

The parish clergy and vestry (mission council) know the local context of the congregation best. You should thoughtfully and prayerfully consider the state of those present as pertains to the known numbers of vaccinated/recovered congregants, presence of the elderly, children, and/or immunocompromised, and other pertinent factors when implementing these guidelines.

Whatever guidelines you decide to implement should be agreed to by your rector and vestry/mission council.

Should you have any questions about the compliance of the guidelines you implement with state/local health directives, be sure to consult with the appropriate agencies and your insurance provider.

All guidelines should be practiced in an attitude of Christian love and with mutual respect for one another's choices regarding their own health.

Thank you for all your efforts to lead your congregations well through the challenging months of this pandemic. The diocesan leadership continues to pray for you as you review COVID guidelines for your congregations.

Let us remember that God's grace (enabling favor) is sufficient for us! *"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."* (Gal. 6:9) Let us all pray for God's continual healing grace and wisdom to be released until this pandemic is fully behind us

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these guidelines or directives, please feel free to contact me directly.

Your fellow servant,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Mark". The plus sign is positioned to the left of the name "Mark", which is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

The Rt. Rev. Mark A. Engel