

The image at the left is the Average Daily Rate of COVID-19 Cases Among Persons Living in Community Settings per 100,000 Population By Town in Connecticut. It is one of the data points that the Reopening Committee has relied upon in assessing our activities and any possible return to in-person worship. Stamford dropped out of its red zone designation yesterday and into orange. It is a step in the right direction! Along with the CDC's mask news (or unmasking news) yesterday for those who are fully vaccinated, it feels as if we are at an inflection point in dealing with the Coronavirus. Churches, like every other organization, are following these developments with great interest. While there is great hope for returning to in-person worship, there is a great deal to do before we get there. Almost certainly, there will also be a few hiccups along the way. The Reopening Committee continues its work, and we will have more information to you shortly about plans for the immediate and longer term future. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Even when we return, there will be changes that we will have to get used to. We will not be returning to a worship that we knew pre-pandemic. We are developing a registration form for worship. This is most certainly different. Sharing the peace will certainly look different. Communion will be done differently. Singing will not only look different, but it may also sound a bit different. Coffee Hour? Different. Bulletins? Different. Ushering? Different. All of this may be a bit uncomfortable. There are very few rituals that are more constant, steady, and fixed than Episcopal liturgy. Yet, I hope that doing things differently may allow us to recognize--in a way that we could not before--what worship, communion, the peace, and parish life mean. When things change, we realize what we experienced with a different perspective. Often, we see in a way that we could not before. May this be true for us going forward.

One of the tricky issues that we will need to address is how to balance safety with opening things up and, particularly, how to involve everyone equally. This became evident in a conversation around communion. If people are at worship, they would commune. Yet, we began discussing those who, for any variety of reasons, could not attend worship but participated via the livestream. Does the communion of those present create a divide between those who cannot attend? What to do? Well, one thought is to bring communion to those who would want to receive it in their homes. We did this prior to the pandemic with Lay Eucharistic Visitors. Such a ministry would take on a little bit of a different expression, but the goal is the same as before: to include as many as possible in the worship and meal of the community.

Which, I think, is the main point for us as we soon will enter another phase in the pandemic's impact on our life together. Our actions, from the start, have been focused on doing what will keep people safe. This commitment will continue. What we will work on as things

change is how to include people. There will be those worshipping in person. There will be others remaining at home and live streaming. There will be those vaccinated. There will be others who--for various reasons--may not. There will be adjustments to entering the church itself. There will be tweaks made to how we worship. All of this is to say that this transition--like so many in life--will not necessarily be smooth and easy. It will take work. Hopefully, our efforts and our deliberations are marked by concern for the health of each other, finding ways to include everyone, practicing patience and forgiveness where necessary, and embodying what it is that we believe God shows us: Love.