

Prayer Centered Church + Mission-Shaped Diocese
Welcome All. Share Jesus' Love. Serve the World.
Bishop's Pastoral Advisory

Amendments to Diocesan COVID 19 Protocols/Guidelines
"Return to your stronghold O prisoners of Hope" (Zechariah 9: 12)

My beloved diocesan family,

Grace and peace in our Lord and Savior's Name!

You will recall that all through this ongoing pandemic, the diocese has relied heavily on the guidance of federal and state authorities including the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to inform diocesan directives and/or advisories. We have remained faithful to the science while at the same time respecting and maintaining jurisdictional guidelines observed by the nine (9) counties within our diocesan boundaries. The diocese has done so cautiously while observing its Anglican/Episcopal principle of subsidiarity and interpretation of contextual theology and ecclesiology.

After the previous advisory dated May 13, 2021, the clergy, lay leadership and members of the Diocesan COVID 19 Pandemic Preparedness & Response Task Force met on Tuesday, May 18, for the purpose of revisiting and adjusting appropriate amendments to the Diocesan Protocols/Guidelines. This action was prompted by the recent announcements from the Center for Disease Control and State of Maryland to suspend many critical aspects in their COVID-19 Protocols.

We realized that these latest directives have major ramifications for our diocesan way of life and the functioning of our churches. We interpret the Church's ministry to be a spiritual institution whose primary goal is to serve the people of God in every aspect of their daily lives. As such, the health and safety of our sisters and brothers has been and continues to be our primary priority in this time of a global pandemic.

The recent directives from CDC and state include the dispensation of mandates on social distancing; wearing masks at indoor and outdoor gatherings; sanitization of open surfaces; and so on. I have highlighted the former two areas because they have surfaced throughout the pandemic as extremely controversial and conflictual resulting in highly emotive reactions. The diocesan amendments to our protocols seek to conform with directives issued by CDC and State of Maryland. Please find a chart that outlines the new COVID-19 Protocols [HERE](#).

In addition to the amendments set forth by the Diocesan COVID-19 Task Force, I would direct that clergy and lay are permitted to resume anointing for final rites, unction, chrismation, baptism and other aspects of pastoral ministry previously suspended. Nevertheless, strict sanitization is advised after every pastoral visit or pastoral ministry.

As we move forward in this new dispensation, I would strongly urge extreme caution with Christian tolerance and careful consideration of our fellow family members in this community of faith and our neighbors. They may wish to continue wearing protective

masks or face covering and we should respect their choice to exercise that right. Furthermore, I encourage each of us to exercise compassion in considering the health and safety of our unvaccinated children and young people, persons who possess compromised immune system and/or underlying health conditions. Let us be mindful of the command from our Lord to LOVE and CARE for the 'least among us'. As we rejoice at the good news on the lifting of restrictions, may our actions be informed by grace and mercy as we return to some semblance of living and relearn the art of living life under more freedom and less anxiety.

On behalf of the diocese, I extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to our clergy, lay leaders and parishioners for the patience, tolerance, consideration, kindness, creativity, adaptability and thoughtfulness exercised during the pandemic. As much as life may be changed for the good in these ensuing months, compared to the past 14 months, I caution everyone to remain vigilant and be your own self-advocate. You are the person most knowledgeable about what's comfortable to you and your loved ones.

On a note of personal privilege, I shall continue to wear my mask and shield in public gatherings, including worship, indefinitely. This is a statement of solidarity with our unvaccinated children and young people. I have three grandchildren and until I am convinced their health and safety is secured, along with all my surrogate children, as well as the young people in our diocese, I shall be walking with them in this journey.

In addition, as a global missionary for Christ, I have friends and family members in my home country Guyana and continent of South America; my adopted country Bahamas; my former Province of the Indian Ocean, comprised of Madagascar, Seychelles and Mauritius; global mission partners in Africa and my ancestral country, India. All these beloved souls are in under-served and vulnerable countries in the wider global community. These individuals near and dear to me are being stymied in their efforts to access COVID-19 vaccinations, I invite you to stand in solidarity with them in this health and safety crisis.

My beloved, may the wind of the Spirit blow afresh and anew in your lives with renewed hope, renewal of spirit, optimism and vitality and that of our diocesan family as we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost on Sunday. I love you with the love Jesus shares with all of us and continue to pray for your health and safety and that of your loved ones.

Every Blessing!

Bishop San
XI Bishop of Easton
Feast of Pentecost 2021