

The Diocesan COVID Medical Task Force met Thursday, March 3, to consider the most recent CDC recommendations and how they might apply to the parishes and communities in the Diocese of Southern Ohio. The Task Force reached a consensus on the following updated guidelines:

- Social gatherings, including coffee hours, shared meals, and receptions, are now allowed. Precautions should include good hand sanitation, cross-ventilation for airflow, and social distancing for indoor events.
- With these precautions in place, congregations may resume food ministries, and outside groups may return to our buildings.
  - Wearing masks is optional but often prudent—and always permitted—both at social gatherings and in worship. Everyone may sing, either with a mask or without.
- Congregations may offer the common cup at communion. Each person should decide whether to receive in one kind (the bread only) or also to drink from the cup. Intinction, once so common in the Episcopal Church, contributes to the spread of any communicable disease. The Task Force strongly discourages this practice.
- At-risk groups deserve special attention, and these include the oldest and youngest among us. Young children have not yet had access to vaccines, and planners should consider this fact when planning Sunday School. Masking, hand washing, using larger rooms, and providing cross-ventilation make a safer space for those ages zero to four.
- The past year's data has shown that vaccinations do more than anything else to prevent disease spread and serious illness.
  - The Task Force, as it has all along, strongly recommends the vaccine and booster.
- Many of our congregations have grown accustomed to using dual platforms, both in-person and digital media, for much of what we do—worship, education, and meetings. The Task Force

encourages the use of both platforms. The capacity of clergy, staff, and unpaid volunteers should be a consideration, however, as the increased demands of providing two platforms has stretched the limits for many of our people and leaders.

- Leaders, lay and ordained, should continue to monitor COVID spread locally, both to assess the larger community and the needs of parish. A trend signaling increased spread of the virus, or the arrival of a troubling new variant, will require a return to stricter guidelines.

The downward trend of infections and hospitalizations may signal a turning point in the pandemic. The way forward is likely not a straight line, but there is reason for hope. Pray God that cause for hope will continue.

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