



The
Episcopal Diocese
of New York

May 27, 2021

To the Clergy and People of the Diocese

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are finally beginning to emerge from the long period of isolation and restraint caused by the COVID-19 pandemic! The miracle of the coronavirus vaccines is opening up our communities and lives faster than we had imagined, and people are returning to pre-COVID practices as our congregations take the next steps in reopening our church buildings for worship and service. I pray that you all are well and even thriving as we take these next steps together.

In all we do as the church, we remember that we have a primary responsibility not only to include but also to protect the most vulnerable among us, which include the unvaccinated, children, and the chronically ill. We also have a biblical mandate to welcome the stranger at the gate, so all of our decisions need to be mindful of the larger community around us, including people we may not know. These decisions need to bear witness to the common life we share with one another.

I have been told by more than one church that “we are all vaccinated.” And I know that what they mean by that is their own congregation. And I understand and appreciate that. But when I say “we,” I mean a diocese which speaks twelve languages; which is white and black and brown and Asian; which is rich and poor; which is urban and rural. When I say “we,” I mean our two hundred congregations and our whole human family all together, and that “we” is very sacred to me. We definitely have communities in which most people have been vaccinated, but across the Diocese of New York, that is really only about 50%. For African Americans in the Bronx it is 26%. The Diocese of New York is far from fully vaccinated. We know that the rollout of vaccinations has shined a light on the inequities of health care for the poor and people of color, and we know that early access to the vaccines was often a matter of privilege. Who will we leave behind? So what we mean by “we” should inform the decisions which individual parishes make. My own prayer is that as we begin to come out of COVID, we may all rise together.

Our protocols throughout the pandemic have centered on the use of masks, the washing of hands, physical distancing, communion in one kind, and singing only under the twelve-foot distancing required by the state. These protocols, and no others, will continue, with the exceptions noted below, to be the basic recommendation of my office to all parishes for public worship, as they are in keeping with the April 2021 protocols published as mandates by the State of New York.

The exceptions are as follows:

- The requirement that people wear masks will not apply to
- people who are distanced and seated.
- groups in which it is known that everyone has been fully vaccinated.
- The requirement of six-foot physical distancing will not apply to those who have been vaccinated.

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With these protocols, I will repeat what I have said in previous letters, which is that I will ask no limitations on our parishes beyond what is required by the state, and repeat that I am counting on clergy and parish leaders to use your best judgment in making decisions regarding in-person worship in your churches. I am also aware that the situation of our parishes and communities regarding COVID varies dramatically across the diocese, and with the situation regarding vaccines changing daily, I will not make blanket requirements for all of our churches. One size does not fit all. That said, the church should not be in the business of creating yet another caste system separating those who are vaccinated from those who are not.

I will also let you know that we are transitioning back into an open office. The staff will begin to come back into our space during June, and we are targeting the day after Labor Day to be fully open and the full staff back in our offices.

I am acutely aware of the stresses with which all of us are living. And re-opening is proving to be every bit as stressful or more so than the last year of COVID itself. I carved out a bit of time and got on a plane to see my grandsons. Six and Eight years old. Four and Six the last time I saw them. That brief break, and the reconnection with those I love was an extraordinary gift and has given me good emotional and spiritual nourishment to return to this work. I implore all of you to take your vacation time this summer. You have all more than earned it, and I want you well and at peace for the life and work and joys which still lie before us. With every good wish, I remain

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+ Andy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche
Bishop of New York