



March 5, 2021

To the Clergy and People of the Diocese

My Brothers and Sisters,

I believe that this will be my final communication to you regarding worship practices in the Diocese of New York during COVID time. Over the last year, you have received a number of letters as the circumstances of the pandemic have ebbed and flowed, and the number of those messages in itself I think creates its own confusion. In my last communication on this subject, I said that I would require no new restrictions on public worship, encouraging churches to refrain from public worship as COVID surged in New York, and calling on churches to follow the state guidelines and to use their best, and cautious, judgment.

We are now in a season which offers us great hope and calls on us again to caution. Two million people a day are being vaccinated in America, and we may anticipate a time in the next months when the crushing surges of the virus which have impaired our common life may be behind us. At the same time, the dramatic decrease in infections across America has been less noticeable in New York than in other parts of the country, and the decreases we have enjoyed seem to have flattened out. This is still very much a time to exercise caution, and it would be imprudent to imagine that we are yet close to being “back to normal.”

However, I am removing all restrictions which I have required in the past regarding opening our sanctuaries to public worship and asking only that the limitations required or recommended by the State of New York be our governing principles in these matters. I believe that the current guidelines allow for 50% capacity for public worship. At the same time, I still must insist that we all observe the protocols we established last Spring for hygiene, masking and distancing, public singing, and for the safe practice of the eucharist. I am convinced that our worship protocols, together with the State guidelines for public worship, taken together, will be all we need to safely bring us through the final months of COVID.

This last year has been awful. We have lived through profound losses and have been exhausted by the limitations on our lives. The day is coming when we will be able to open our doors fully to our congregations and the world. But right now, all I can offer is my admiration and gratitude to the clergy and parish leaders who have navigated a season we never imagined and have done so safely and responsibly. Persevere. And may God make us brave and strong and faithful to endure and finish the course. I could not be prouder or more grateful. And with all my love, I remain

Yours,



The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche
Bishop of New York