



The  
Episcopal Diocese  
of New York

November 24, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In my address three weeks ago at our Diocesan Convention, I gave notice that we were likely in the near future to see a renewed Suspension of Public Worship. But within days we learned that a highly effective vaccine against the coronavirus has been developed and is not far from availability. Since then two other manufacturers have announced equally effective vaccines. It is clear that within weeks some of the most at-risk people will be able to be vaccinated, and over the months to come that will extend to the whole population. This is profoundly good news!

However, since then the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to surge at an alarming rate across the United States and the world, and here in New York, too, though at a more modest rate. Whatever happens with the vaccines, the story of the next few months will be the surge. Right now, almost 260,000 Americans have died of COVID-19, and there are projections that that number could come close to doubling over the winter. This is not the time to relax the disciplines we have accepted on worship and ministry. As I said from our cathedral, our customary church life will be given back to us, if we can get everyone safely to the other side together. In this letter I will lay out a short-term and a longer term-plan, and some direction on what you can expect next.

**AT THIS TIME, I AM CALLING ON ALL CHURCHES  
TO LIMIT IN-PERSON WORSHIP TO TEN PEOPLE.**

All protocols of hygiene and handwashing, masking and distancing, are to be rigorously observed. Practices of communion, in those places where the Holy Eucharist will continue, must follow the safety guidelines which I put in place in July. Also, the ten people allowed for worship must include the celebrant, assisting ministers, musicians, and camera operators. This restriction of numbers will apply to worship services held inside and outside equally.

I believe that this restriction, put in place now, is in keeping with state and city guidelines, but I also believe it is short-term. If the winter surge of the virus progresses as expected, we are likely to move to a full Suspension of Public Worship, and if that happens that announcement will be made at that time. But I am also aware that the levels of infection are not equal across the diocese. Some areas are being hit harder. Given that, I want local clergy and wardens to be responsive to virus spikes in your communities, and free to make decisions appropriate to your local conditions. If appropriate to your circumstances, I encourage you to suspend public worship now.

**THEREFORE, YOU MAY CREATE LOCAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES  
WHICH ARE MORE RESTRICTIVE, TO INCLUDE A FULL SUSPENSION,  
BUT YOU MAY NOT CREATE POLICIES WHICH ARE LESS RESTRICTIVE.**

You will receive shortly a schedule of bishop visitations for 2021 which will have no dates on it. It is a schedule which we will implement when we can. But we will send it now so that churches can anticipate if they will receive a visitation earlier or later. It should be assumed that visitations,

*(continued)*

which we had hoped would resume at the turn of the year, are more likely to resume later in the winter, or even in the spring.

I feel confident that the responsible and caring ways in which we handled the coronavirus surge last spring will serve us well again now. We must be cautious and vigilant now, and work to bring our people safely through what may be a long, hard winter. But we may hope, with greater confidence now, that the new year will bring vaccine and therapies and recovery, and we may hope that, by the grace of God, 2021 will be a time of regathering and renewal. A time which will cover us over with blessing and grace. With all my prayers for you, and all my love, 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