



The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." 1 John 4:7

My siblings in Christ,

As we seek to navigate these challenging times it is good to be able to ground ourselves in the truth. Sometimes the most important truths are also the simplest. Perhaps the most important is this- God is love. Nothing could be more important right now. This beautiful truth lifts us and sustains us. It also reminds us of how we should treat those around us.

After consultation with the Health Committee and prayerful consideration, I have determined that we will continue with our modified Phase I restrictions through the end of this month. All churches should continue to offer only virtual worship with a maximum of 10 people physically present. If additional persons, such as musicians, are desired, this may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Exceptions for weddings, funerals and other pastoral services will also continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis. If you have a request you wish me to consider, please email me directly, copying Canons Wamsley and Berlenbach.

I make this decision grounded in the love of Jesus Christ who calls us to love one another as he first loved us. Of particular concern are the following factors:

1. The anticipated post-Christmas/New Year's surge is beginning to grow. Current data from both the PA Dept. of Health and the CMU Risk Based Decision Support Tool indicate that all 5

counties in our area are at significant risk of the disease. Moreover, the national death toll continues to set terrible new records, now reaching 4,000 people per day.

2. The appearance of a new, much more easily transmissible variant. This variant has spreading across the country and has recently been identified in Dauphin County. It increases the rate of transmission making controlling its spread more difficult and more imperative.
3. While we are close to a solution in the form of vaccinations, it will be months before the entire population can be vaccinated and we need to hold the line, remaining vigilant, in what we hope will be the last months of the pandemic.
4. We recognize that there are limited medical resources nationally and have a moral responsibility to care for and protect, not just our parishioners but everyone in our community.

I will continue to closely monitor the numbers and update you about this plan the week of January 25. Barring continued rise, it is my hope that churches may resume in-person worship under our [modified Phase II protocols](#) starting February 6.

In terms of the vaccine, thousands across our diocese are now receiving this life-saving treatment each day. This gives us great hope for the days to come, days when rates of illness and death will fall, days in which we may safely visit with family and friends, days when we may hug again without worry and gather for meals. In hope we look forward to a day not too far in the future when we might gather for worship in our sanctuaries, pass the peace, share fellowship and sing the praises of God. With that hope in mind, we encourage everyone to get the vaccine as soon as they are eligible. In doing so you not only protect yourself but also those around you.

Each county will have its own system and schedule for offering the vaccine. We will be sharing more information as to how they can sign up and when those shots may be available as it is made public. In addition, we will be assembling resources to help churches encourage their members to get vaccinated. We will notify you when they are available and publish them on our website. The diocese has worked with state and

local officials to have clergy of all denominations classified as essential workers, now eligible to get the vaccine in group 1B.

If you have any questions please contact Canon Shawn Wamsley, swamsley@diopa.org, or Canon Kirk Berlenbach, kberlenbach@diopa.org.

We are in the home stretch but we cannot falter. It is not hyperbole to say that lives are at stake. We must hold to the precious truth of God's love. Grounded in that truth and guided by our faith in Jesus Christ we will continue to love one another as he loved us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized initial 'D' with a cross symbol above it. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the name 'Daniel' visible in the middle. To the right of the main signature, there is a small, handwritten 'XVI'.

Bishop Daniel

