

Let me say that here at The Falls Church Episcopal and in the Diocese of Virginia we will gravitate to the safer and more careful ways. We will be guided by love of our neighbor and caring for the health, safety, and well-being of all, especially the most vulnerable among us. We move forward with these loving guidelines and under the guidelines of our Bishops (which you have seen and is available on our website). Your wardens and I have appointed a comprehensive task force that is in the process of discerning how we will do that. Please join them in praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance for how we will move ahead. This team includes your Clergy, Wardens, Staff, and members of our community (and some vestry) who have legal, medical, scientific, and practical experience in dealing with all that needs to be dealt. For a list of the task force, please click [here](#).

We will be considering all options, including worship opportunities to gather outside. **It will be important to hear your voices and so please respond to the Task Force's survey that will go out next week.** But keep in mind that all initial gatherings for a while, we know, will be with appropriate physical distancing and the wearing of masks, and following protocols for entering and exiting that could get complicated. There will be no corporate singing and we aren't sure how to share in the sacraments safely.

No matter what the authorities among us allow, or even urge, your leadership's counsel is to take it easy. Even when the time comes that we can permit parishioners to worship inside the church naves, I know that many parishioners will simply not want to jump back into close contact. There are at least two reasons to be slow and careful about re-engaging in-person worship. The first is safety and the common good. We stand for safety and wellness for all!

But let me also remind us all that our church is not closed, we will not be "re-opening" because we have been open! We have just been experiencing spiritual communion and mission in a different way. No one needs to tell us to open back up! We, each of us, have been bringing in the kingdom of God, and serving Christ, in our own ways, wherever we are. Indeed, our mission has never been simply to go to church on Sundays. Our mission has been to restore all people to God and each other, and to seek and serve Christ in all persons, wherever we are! Our classical and traditional and liturgical "in-person worship" has always been about enabling that mission.

We are fortunate that our online worship services have been heartily received. I find myself praying online with you every Sunday – not just watching church! We are seeing and hearing each other –not just the clergy, but so many faithful parishioners! And I have heard from so many who have truly been encouraged and blessed by our offerings. I am so glad! It is not the same as in-person worship; I know that. But we are doing well. We are communicating the gospel, we are preaching the good news, we are teaching Christ, we are praying and even singing, and we are serving others, in ways that build up the Body of Christ.

Even if there was some process by which we could re-engage in-person worship with all sorts of restrictions and conditions – say, with masks on, or with pews marked off so that we used only a fraction of our space, or with online reservations only—I am not sure what all that would accomplish. We would be seeing and experiencing our holy space, for sure. And, we would be seeing and experiencing each other. But the conditions and restrictions of our in-person re-engagement might well be more discouraging than edifying. And so we will be evaluating that.

And so the Task Force will be evaluating safe possibilities for all sorts of things – just as each of you are doing for your own lives and households. And so the answer, right now, is that I do not know. I do not know when, or how, we will return to in-person worship at The Falls Church Episcopal. I do know that when we do, we all want it to be safe, and for it to be real. It will not be simply because we can, with conditions that are too awkward and burdensome. And, of course, it will not be because we are making some sort of perceived political statement. It will be because we discern that in-person worship will help build up the Body of Christ and help bring in the kingdom of God. That is our mission. Pray for us!

I miss you in person, but love being with you on-line! God bless you and our nation these days.

Pax,

Andy+