



June 29, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

I will be forever grateful for the faithful ways our congregations have responded to the challenges of the Pandemic. It has been a long journey. Yet even when our buildings were closed, the mission of the Church was wide open. Your decisions as to how to conduct worship were guided by science and love of neighbor. In the process, we remembered together that the Church is the people.

The world around us is now opening up again and restrictions are being lifted. This, also, is being guided by science and love of neighbor. Thank God for the vaccines that have brought us into a new and freer era. In my last written statement about in-person worship (March 24, 2021), I encouraged church leaders, ordained and lay, to make decisions based on your local contexts. We are one in Christ, but our circumstances are not the same. Since that time, our congregations have been moving back into their buildings at their own pace, with my full support. In your context, you may choose to continue to wear masks. Church leaders are encouraged to be in dialogue with families with young children to see what they need to feel safe in church. With God's help we will continue to find ways to move forward.

Along the way, we have learned much about how to do on-line worship well. It requires work and attention. It is worth it. Again, depending on your context, see if you can continue on line presence in addition to in person worship. I have heard so many stories about shut-ins and others, near and far, who have been able to feel a part of our communities because of this good work.

With one exception, I write to you now to say that I am lifting all diocesan restrictions previously placed on in-person worship. Here is the one guideline we will keep in place: I encourage you, at least for now, to continue to offer Holy Communion with bread only. This is a guideline and not a mandate. Our people have many different perspectives on receiving from the Cup at this time. I know that some really want the return of the Cup. Others do as well, but see it as too risky. Holy Communion expresses our unity in Christ: though we are many, we are One. Yet it seems to me as if, at least for now, the common Cup may be a source of division and anxiety. I think of St. Paul's wise council to those followers of Jesus in Corinth, when he wrote that all things may be lawful but not necessarily beneficial. I encourage you to wait a little while longer before restoring this vital element of our worship.

Throughout the Pandemic I have relied on advice and counsel from our Deans (Aileen DiBenedetto, Tanya Wallace, Michael Tuck, Nancy Webb Stroud and previously, Peter Swarr) and Canons Rich

Simpson and Vicki Ix. Their wisdom, deep faith and generosity of time have been a great grace to me. Our weekly meetings helped me, and all of us, to model for our diocese what it means to be guided by science and love of neighbor. While we are taking a break for the summer, our meetings will resume on a regular basis for prayer and reflection as we face the work that now lies ahead of us. We remain, through it all, blessed to follow Jesus in his mission of mercy, compassion and hope. I am inspired by your faithful commitment to the Good News that the Living God is with us in all things.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Douglas" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Fisher" is written in a slightly smaller, more compact script to its right. The signature is preceded by a small, stylized cross or plus sign.