



Beloved in Christ,

The recent updates on COVID restrictions from both the governor and the CDC have made it clear that the coming months will bring still more complexity and uncertainty as we live through the later stages of the pandemic. Organizations of every kind are scrambling to figure out how to best guide their communities, and the online noise is growing as people react and opine on what they think everyone ought to do.

The building use task force and I are working to publish some updated guidelines for ECMN next week. What I want you to know today is this: we are intentionally making a shift away from rules everyone must follow in the same way toward guidelines and best practices that help local leaders make the best decisions for their communities. From my perspective looking over our whole diocese, it is clear to me that our contexts, membership and community demographics, buildings, congregational size, etc. are so vastly different, and as all those variables intersect with vaccination rates and variation in local mandates and regulations, a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer sustainable, helpful, or even possible.

The task force will continue to function as thought partners to help you navigate this complexity. In the coming weeks and months, there will be a steady stream of questions about congregational and choral singing, coffee hours and receptions, and many other topics. No one inside or outside ECMN has perfect solutions to any of that at this point, and the whole world will need to learn in real time, together, things that we simply do not yet know. I ask for your patience as we all learn together. The task force will regularly review and put forward the best thinking and guidance on everything related to congregational life.

As you lead, I hope you will continue to ground your decisions in what it means to be a community that follows the way of Jesus, and as such, is guided by questions of what love looks like, what it means to be fully inclusive, and what it means to seek good for the other, particularly those who are marginalized in any way. The

answers to those questions will look different in different places, but those are key questions that should guide us.

Finally, I urge you in the strongest terms to get vaccinated if you have not already done so. Increasing the number of vaccinated people is a critical tool for moving fully out of the pandemic, and part of how we lead is by modeling its importance. I hope you will also actively encourage your congregations to be vaccinated as they become eligible, and that you point them toward local resources for accessing the vaccine.

I have no doubt that you have received many calls and e-mails in the past few days, and that's on top of the weariness you are already carrying. Every single one of you has done an amazing job of leading and serving through the past year. Let's stay in close touch as things continue to unfold, and know that you are ever held in my love and prayers.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Craig Loya", with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Right Reverend Craig Loya
X Bishop
Episcopal Church in Minnesota