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## **STAGE 3 REGATHERING GUIDELINES**

**August 24, 2021**

**If COVID-19 positivity rates in your county are at or above 7.5%, masks are required for everyone at all indoor services.**

# From the Bishops

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight ... and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12:1*

Dear People of the Diocese of North Carolina,

Thank you for your grace-filled, compassionate and faithful leadership as we continue to navigate this pandemic together. Looking ahead to the challenges of this next, and hopefully last, stage of the pandemic, we are heartened and cautious at the same time. Now that the CDC and governor have lifted mask requirements and social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated, our work becomes harder before it gets easier.

There are still people who are part of our beloved community who, for various reasons, are not able to be vaccinated. We are particularly concerned about children under 12, which is 15% of our population. We continue to be committed to providing worship and gatherings that are open to all. There are different ways this can be accomplished. One is for all of us to continue to wear masks and social distance, vaccinated or not. Another is to invite people who are not vaccinated to join us online rather than in person. A third option would be to offer different services, some with masks, some without. Unvaccinated people would be welcome to wear a mask to a service where vaccinated persons are unmasked.

At this stage we strongly recommend our congregations continue to wear masks when indoors and provide social distancing for those who are unvaccinated. However, we can no longer require this of those who are fully vaccinated. We do ask that you decide how you will continue to offer equal opportunity for full and safe participation by all members of your congregation, and to make that clear in your communications.

Over the past months, we have been asking local leaders to take more and more responsibility for determining what is best in your context, for your congregation. This is especially true in Stage 3.

Attached is an update and simplified document for Stage 3. Each topic contains three sections: requirements, recommendations and choices left to local leadership to discern. We are now asking local leaders to respond to our recommendations in the ways you feel will best serve our shared gospel values and make sense for your local community and context.

As your bishops, we are deeply grateful for the prayerful faithfulness, creativity, patience, ingenuity and good will you have exercised throughout the past 15 months. We ask you to remain steadfast in these intentions and to pray with us for the continuing safety and well being of all God’s people, even as we move forward in hope, trusting, in this Pentecost season, in the great gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Faithfully and gratefully,



Bishop Sam Rodman



Bishop Anne Hodges-Copple

	MASKS & SOCIAL DISTANCING	SANITATION	OTHER
REQUIREMENTS	<p>1. Wearing of face masks covering nose and mouth is normative for all persons over the age of 2. Those who are fully vaccinated are generally exempted from this requirement. <b>If COVID-19 positivity rates in your county are at or above 7.5%, however, masks are required for everyone, vaccinated or unvaccinated, at all indoor services.</b></p> <p>2. Maintaining at least 6 feet of space between individuals/pods is normative, as are capacity limitations based on available space. Those who are fully vaccinated are exempted from this requirement only with other fully vaccinated people. (When in doubt, maintain social distance.) Vaccinated people may form a pod with each other and sit together.</p>	<p>1. All worship and activity leaders must practice good hand hygiene, including frequent, careful hand washing/sanitizing to avoid cross contamination. Hands must be sanitized before, during and after any event.</p> <p>2. Avoid contact with others' hands during Communion, food distributions, etc.</p> <p>3. Hand sanitizer must be available at all church functions, including but not limited to worship, committee meetings, Sunday School, etc.</p>	<p>1. Organizations must provide reminders that no public gathering is completely safe, and that removal of masks for those who are unvaccinated can increase the potential risk of infection.</p> <p>2. The established, specific guidelines for schools, children and youth must be followed: <a href="https://www.episdionc.org/uploads/images/guidelines-for-children-families-and-schools-may-28-2021_534.pdf">https://www.episdionc.org/uploads/images/guidelines-for-children-families-and-schools-may-28-2021_534.pdf</a></p> <p>3. Event pre-registration must be used for any activity at which social distancing capacity might be exceeded.</p> <p>4. Contact information of all participants at any function must be obtained to facilitate contact tracing.</p> <p>5. Every organization must have a plan in place to respond to possible COVID exposures.</p>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Encourage use of N-95 or other well-fitting mask for those needing masks.</p>	<p>1. Sanitize all high touch areas (e.g., door handles) before and after any function.</p>	<p>1. Monitor local health indicators to make informed decisions about safety precautions.</p> <p>2. Manage arrival at and departure from activities, including worship, in such a way as to ensure distance is maintained.</p> <p>3. Monitor vaccination rates of the county in which an activity is located and those of surrounding counties. The following website provides current data: <a href="https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard/vaccinations">https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard/vaccinations</a>.</p>

*The above guidelines apply to all church activities, regardless of location, including church offices.*

	MASKS & SOCIAL DISTANCING	COMMUNION	OTHER
REQUIREMENTS	<p>1. Masks must be worn and at least 6 feet of distancing maintained by unvaccinated persons during all activity set ups and clean ups, including preparation of the sacraments.</p> <p>2. <b>Indoors</b> - Masks must be worn by unvaccinated persons at all times, except that participants who have received communion bread may, AFTER they return to their seats, remove their mask to consume the bread. Participants must then put their mask back on and sanitize their hands. Social distancing of at least 6 feet must be maintained from unvaccinated people/pods. <b>If COVID-19 positivity rates in your county are at or above 7.5%, however, masks are required for everyone, vaccinated or unvaccinated, at all indoor services.</b></p> <p>3. <b>Outdoors</b> - Masks must be worn by unvaccinated persons at all times except that congregation members may remove their masks when seated or standing within their pod.</p>	<p>1. A fully vaccinated celebrant may lead the service without a mask, being at least 6-8 feet distanced from others, including the consecration (with or without chanting) and distribution of the elements, provided the bread and wine for distribution are covered. Otherwise, if unvaccinated, the celebrant must wear a mask throughout the service, including the consecration and distribution of the elements, except when the celebrant removes the mask to consume the bread and wine. <b>This applies even in counties with 7.5% or higher COVID-19 positivity rates.</b></p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Masks are highly recommended for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, unless for allowances otherwise noted (i.e. vaccinated preachers) or when masks are required for everyone based on COVID-19 positivity rates.</p> <p>2. Fully vaccinated preachers, readers, or intercessors who remove their masks while speaking should be at least 6-8 feet from any person. <b>This applies even in counties with 7.5% or higher COVID-19 positivity rates.</b></p> <p>3. Consider providing a designated area or service for those who wish to maintain social distancing.</p>	<p>1. During the Gospel procession, both the Gospel reader and the person holding the Gospel book are strongly encouraged to wear masks, regardless of vaccination status.</p>	<p>1. Minimize the number of people involved with preparation for and clean up after services.</p> <p>2. Provisions should be made for virtual worship and other accommodations as necessary to allow participation in church life by all people.</p> <p>3. Think about how to minimize the number of people setting up for worship (i.e., altar guild).</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<p>1. <b>Outdoors</b> - Unvaccinated preachers, celebrants, readers, etc., may remove their masks when seated and/or standing in place, including while preaching/reading, provided they are at least 10 feet from the nearest person.</p> <p>2. Think about how to guard and maintain social distancing before, during and after services.</p>	<p>1. Communion may be offered in both kinds, following diocesan protocols, <a href="#">found here</a>.</p>	<p>1. Clergy who are fully vaccinated may perform services of baptism, healing, etc., without restriction, including the administration of chrism/anointing, in consultation and agreement with the family/individual.</p> <p>2. Consider whether and how to safely reintroduce children/youth to the altar party, particularly those who cannot yet be vaccinated.</p>

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR
REQUIREMENTS	<p>1. If vaccination status of participants cannot be verified and singing will take place (i.e. a public worship service), <b>masking is required during the entire service</b>. Options for social distancing must be provided for unvaccinated people and those who need to keep social distance. But distancing is not required for fully vaccinated participants, provided they are masked.</p> <p>2. Per CDC guidelines, unvaccinated persons must be masked when attending a worship service or choir rehearsal.</p> <p>3. Air Flow/Filtration: For all indoor activities, especially where unvaccinated participants may be present, good air flow and filtration remain essential. Air filters are MERV-13 quality or greater AND the air exchange rate of at least 3x per hour is necessary OR the opening of doors and windows and/or the use of fans to provide enough air flow to mitigate risk. If neither of those options are available to you, contact the diocese and for further guidance.</p> <p>4. During choir rehearsal, masking is mandated for everyone, vaccinated or unvaccinated.</p> <p>5. People must be informed of the risks: <i>No gathering can be completely safe. Unvaccinated people remain susceptible to contracting COVID-19. Singing can increase transmission from infected individuals.</i></p>	<p>1. Youth Choirs: Children who are not vaccinated must remain masked outdoors. Distancing not required.</p>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Distancing <i>and</i> masking continues to be the safest option.</p> <p>2. A vaccinated soloist may sing unmasked indoors at a distance from the congregation. (6-8 feet is recommended.)</p> <p>3. All choir rehearsals should work in periodic breaks to allow for air circulation. The recommendation is a 20-minute break after 30 minutes of singing or the equivalent of shorter increments of break/singing time.</p>	<p>1. Masks and distancing not required, but obviously remain an option, especially for the unvaccinated.</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<p>1. Singing by the congregation, choir, and soloists is authorized.</p> <p>2. Wind and brass instruments: may be played provided that the instrumentalists are at least 8 feet from the nearest person and bell covers are used.</p>	<p>1. Unmasked congregational/choir/solo singing is authorized.</p>

	FACILITY VISITS	HOME VISITS
REQUIREMENTS	<p>1. Facility visits (e.g., hospitals, senior housing, hospice) are authorized; clergy and lay visitors must follow the facility requirements.</p>	<p>1. Home visits by clergy and laity are authorized. Mask use and social distancing recommendations are below.</p>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Limit visits to 30 minutes or less, unless all parties are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>2. Use preprinted bulletins, disposable purificators, etc., to minimize sanitation issues.</p>	<p>1. Limit visits to 30 minutes or less, unless all parties are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>2. Use preprinted bulletins, disposable purificators, etc., to minimize sanitation issues.</p> <p>3. For home visits, consider meeting outdoors, if all persons are not fully vaccinated.</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT		<p>1. If all persons are vaccinated, mask use and social distancing during home visits are at the discretion of the visitor and the individual(s) being visited.</p>

## FOOD & BEVERAGE SERVICE

### REQUIREMENTS

1. All persons involved in preparation and/or serving of food must be masked.
2. Social distancing must be maintained if there are unvaccinated persons in the kitchens, service areas or dining areas.
3. All persons preparing and/or serving food must maintain sanitary standards, including frequent and careful handwashing and sanitizing.
4. Food and beverages must be offered in single-serve units or served by a designated server.
5. Shared utensils and punch bowls are not authorized.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. While it is understood that outdoors is safer, indoor receptions, coffee hours and meals are permitted. **We strongly recommend food not be served indoors if COVID-19 positivity rates in your county are at or above 7.5%.**
2. Food and beverages can be either placed on tables for members to pick up or may be brought to them on a tray or in a basket.
3. “Box lunches” or prepackaged meals may be brought in.
4. Beverages should be individual servings in presealed containers (water, canned or bottled soda, juice boxes, etc.) If coffee is served, the same person who makes the coffee should pour the coffee into cups. Individual packets of sweetener and creamer should be provided.
5. If servings are part of a whole (slices of pizza, pieces of cake, etc.), portions should be placed on individual plates and covered.
6. Parishes should designate “hosts” who are vaccinated volunteers who prepare and serve food for a given event. Hand washing facilities and ample hand sanitizer need to be available to them.
7. Trash cans should be easily accessible for disposal of packaging.
8. At this time, it is recommended that there be no cooking in a parish kitchen. If kitchen facilities are needed (refrigerator, prep space), social distancing should be maintained by those in the kitchen.

### LOCAL DISCERNMENT

1. Masked servers may place food items on individuals’ plates in a socially distanced serving line.

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR
RECOMMENDATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider whether a virtual meeting could be conducted in lieu of in-person.</li> <li>2. Use the largest/best ventilated space in which the group can comfortably meet—for example, use the parish hall rather than a classroom.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider outdoor meetings/gatherings rather than indoors.</li> </ol>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think about how to include participants who want to attend gatherings that are in person through use of Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, etc.</li> <li>2. Think about whether work can be done via email or other technology.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think about how to include participants who want to attend gatherings that are in person through use of Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, etc.</li> <li>2. Think about whether work can be done via email or other technology.</li> <li>3. Consider whether an outdoor area can be permanently made suitable for meetings/gatherings by installing tables, shelter, etc.</li> </ol>