



STAGE 3B GUIDELINES

March 11, 2022

From the Bishops - March 1, 2022

“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. We are encouraged to see that the grip of the omicron variant is rapidly diminishing, and we remain vigilant about news of emerging new variants. As we move from a climate of pandemic to a landscape of the endemic presence of COVID-19 variants, we are heartened and cautious at the same time.

Now that the CDC and governor are rapidly making adjustments to mask requirements and social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated, as well as for those who will not or cannot yet be vaccinated, we are also continuing to adjust our own diocesan recommendations. 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 5 years old who do not yet have access to the vaccine. We know that many of our people have underlying medical vulnerabilities to the extent that even being fully vaccinated means they must still exercise caution.

We continue to be committed to providing worship and gatherings that are open to all. There are different ways to accomplish this. 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 is to offer different services, some with masks, some without. Unvaccinated people also would be welcome to wear a mask to a service where vaccinated persons are unmasked.

As of March 1, we are moving from masks being required back to masks being strongly recommended for those who are vaccinated during indoor worship and meetings. We still require masks and social distancing for those who are not vaccinated. We will no longer require this, however, of those who are fully vaccinated. We do ask local leadership to decide how best 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. We appreciate the weight of this responsibility for this work as well as the wisdom you bring to it.

You will notice in this updated document we have made more modifications to Stage 3B in light of recommendations from the CDC and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Attached is an update and simplified document for Stage 3B. Each topic contains three sections: requirements, recommendations and choices left to local leadership to discern. We continue to ask our 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 two years. 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 season of Lent, 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. Masks are required for unvaccinated individuals over the age of 2 but optional—though recommended—for everyone else.</p> <p>2. Unvaccinated individuals must maintain 6 feet of social distance from others outside of their pod.</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. 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. Download them here.</p> <p>3. Every organization must have a plan in place to respond to possible COVID-19 exposures.</p>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Maintaining at least 6 feet of space between individuals/pods is strongly encouraged, as are capacity limitations based on available space. Those who are fully vaccinated are exempted from this recommendation when with other fully vaccinated people.</p>	<p>1. Avoid contact with others' hands during Communion, food distributions, etc.</p>	<p>1. Event pre-registration is recommended.</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<p>1. If your local area has lifted mask mandates, the Diocese will not require masking for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, including while singing. Local leaders should discern whether or not they will continue to require masks at other times during church gatherings. Updated guidance from the CDC is useful in making these decisions. Access the guidance here.</p>	<p>1. Discern how to 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. Monitor vaccination rates of the county in which an activity is located and those of surrounding counties. The following website provides current data: https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard/vaccinations.</p> <p>3. Consider how to best address tracking and tracing.</p>

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

	MASKS & SOCIAL DISTANCING	COMMUNION	OTHER
REQUIREMENTS	<p>1. Masks are required for unvaccinated individuals over the age of 2 but optional—though recommended—for everyone else.</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.</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS			<p>1. Ushers may pass offering plates from the aisle into the pews, and consider whether plates will remain in an usher's hands or be passed from person to person.</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<p>1. If your local area has lifted mask mandates, the Diocese will not require masking for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, including during singing. Local leaders should discern whether or not they will continue to require masks at other times during church gatherings. Updated guidance from the CDC is useful in making these decisions. Access the guidance here.</p> <p>2. Consider providing a designated area or service for those who wish to maintain social distancing.</p>	<p>1. Communion may be offered in both kinds, following diocesan protocols, found here.</p> <p>2. Consider how to handle the passing of the peace, making sure to allow for people to indicate if they are not comfortable with physical contact.</p>	<p>1. Provisions should be made for virtual worship and other accommodations as necessary to allow participation in church life by all people.</p>

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR
REQUIREMENTS	<p>1. Masks are required for unvaccinated individuals over the age of 2 but optional—though recommended—for everyone else, including during congregational singing. Options for social distancing must be provided for unvaccinated people and those who need to keep social distance.</p> <p>2. Per CDC guidelines, unvaccinated persons must be masked during 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. 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>	
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Distancing <i>and</i> masking continues to be the safest option.</p> <p>2. 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. Youth Choirs: It is recommended children who are not vaccinated remain masked outdoors. Distancing is not required.</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<p>1. A vaccinated soloist may sing unmasked indoors at a distance from the congregation. (6-8 feet is recommended.)</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 for people who are vaccinated is authorized.</p> <p>2. Masks and distancing are not required, but obviously remain an option, especially for the unvaccinated.</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>1. Limit visits to 30 minutes or less, unless all parties are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>2. For home visits, consider meeting outdoors if all persons are not fully vaccinated or if anyone is immunocompromised.</p>
LOCAL DISCRETION		<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. Social distancing must be maintained if there are unvaccinated persons in the kitchens, service areas or dining areas.
2. All persons preparing and/or serving food must maintain sanitary standards, including frequent and careful handwashing and sanitizing.

LOCAL DISCERNMENT

1. While it is understood that outdoors is safer, indoor receptions, coffee hours and meals are permitted based on local discernment.

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>1. Consider whether a virtual meeting could be conducted in lieu of in-person.</p> <p>2. Use the largest/best ventilated space in which the group can comfortably meet—for example, use the parish hall rather than a classroom.</p>	<p>1. Consider outdoor meetings/gatherings rather than indoors.</p>
LOCAL DISCERNMENT	<p>1. Think about how to include participants who want to attend gatherings that are in person through use of Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, etc.</p> <p>2. If your local area has lifted mask mandates, the Diocese will not require masking for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, including while singing. Local leaders should discern whether or not they will continue to require masks at other times during church gatherings. Updated guidance from the CDC is useful in making these decisions. Access the guidance here.</p>	<p>1. Think about how to include participants who want to attend gatherings that are in person through use of Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, etc.</p> <p>2. Consider whether an outdoor area can be permanently made suitable for meetings/gatherings by installing tables, shelter, etc.</p> <p>3. If your local area has lifted mask mandates, the Diocese will not require masking for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, including while singing. Local leaders should discern whether or not they will continue to require masks at other times during church gatherings. Updated guidance from the CDC is useful in making these decisions. Access the guidance here.</p>