

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



January 13, 2021

Dear friends in Christ,

Governor Wolf has recently modified the restrictions that were put into place last month in an attempt to limit the community spread of the Covid-19 virus. Though houses of worship were not included in the new guidelines, the governor has repeatedly expressed his hope that churches will voluntarily exercise the utmost caution in any gatherings.

Over the last week, many of the clergy I have consulted have expressed the intention not to reopen for public worship for several more weeks, at least. Others have said they may choose to re-open sooner with strict limits on attendance. As always, I have been impressed by the care with which local leadership in our congregations is approaching the task of keeping our people and our neighborhoods safe and well.

In my advisory of December 11, I asked us all to refrain from public worship through the holidays. Now, I think we have moved into a phase that might permit limited gatherings for Sunday worship in some contexts. As before, I expect that the ordained and lay leadership of the congregation will be of one mind regarding any such plan, and ask that I be consulted in advance of its implementation.

I emphasize that we are still in a very dangerous period of this pandemic. We are all tired, and increasingly impatient. For exactly this reason, I ask those who choose to move forward, to do so with an abundance of care. All the protocols already approved and in place in our churches need to continue for the indefinite future. Those at high risk should not attend. I encourage continued video streaming of Sunday worship, and renewed emphasis on virtual modes of Bible study, formation and prayer.

As we move through Epiphanytide toward Lent, we can take heart in the coming vaccine. And yet, now, more than ever, it is essential that we pay attention to the basic practices we know work well: wearing masks, physical distancing, washing hands. *"Be sober, be watchful,"* warns the apostle in 1 Peter 5:8. *"Your adversary ... prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* Of course Saint Peter is referring to the devil, but the advice also applies to all of the devil's instruments, Covid included. So let us resist the totality of this evil, both the virus and our own temptation to drop our guard or take unwise risks. Across the days and weeks to come, may God help us to be firm in our faith, leaning on Jesus Christ and on one another, as we look forward to the time when we may embrace one another in-person!

May God continue to bless and keep you and those you love safe and well.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dorsey", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh