

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



May 20, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

It seems that we may be slowly emerging from the long winter of the Covid pandemic. Our governor has relaxed many restrictions as of Memorial Day. The CDC has determined that fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks or keep physical distance in public. This is all good news and will bring changes to the way we worship, and otherwise use our buildings.

In my weekly call with the clergy of the diocese, we discussed four points of concern around in-person worship. The first three are familiar: whether we wear masks, how we might sing, and what social distance, if any, we must keep. The fourth concern is new: how we may help those who remain unvaccinated to stay safe and well.

As for the first three, I have always trusted the leadership of our parishes to make sound decisions in collaboration with each other and in consultation with me. This approach has proven very effective. You know your building, your people and your context. So, now, as always, your local leadership will devise a plan for the foreseeable future as we enter into the next phase of the changing conditions in this pandemic. In certain cases it may take some time to make adjustments, so please be patient with your clergy and wardens.

I will continue to wear a mask during my visitations, removing it only when I preach and when I preside at the altar. I will also keep an appropriate distance, and sing only with a mask on. I do so for the sake of those who are not vaccinated. Some are concerned about complicating their health due to other conditions they may have, while others choose not to be vaccinated for a variety of reasons. Most children are not yet vaccinated, and the very young cannot be. It is for their sake, the sake of the most vulnerable among us, that those of us who have little to fear are called to show our care.

There are many ways we can do this. The various solutions I am hearing from your clergy allow greater freedom, while showing care and respect for all. Whatever this looks like in your congregation, in the end it is simply about showing hospitality to those who continue to be at risk. Saint Paul clearly puts this consideration at the top of the list in his guidelines for Christian gatherings: whatever you do, do not put a stumbling block in the way of those who are weak. Look not only to your own interests but to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself for our sake. (cf. Phil. 2:4-7).

As always, I am very proud and grateful for the way the parishes of this diocese have navigated the treacherous waters of the last fifteen months, and I am fully confident that you will continue to show this unity and care as you prepare to welcome your next bishop. Know that as you do so, you will remain in my prayers. Now, more than ever, 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