

March 31, 2022

To the People of the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina



Dear Friends in Christ,

Two years ago this month, I wrote to you to announce that public in-person worship in the Diocese of East Carolina would be suspended through the end of March, as we came to grips with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two short weeks later, I wrote to extend the suspension through April, thereby limiting our observances of Holy Week and our celebration of Easter Day to worship that we could offer online. Beginning in May of 2020, we initiated a return to public in-person worship, albeit with significant restrictions. Over time, we have gradually eased our restrictions on public in-person worship, each of our worshipping communities doing so at their own pace. More than once since then, in my correspondence with you, I have spoken of the “journey” that we have been on together ...a journey in which we are accompanied by our risen Lord, as were Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) ...a journey in which “we walk by faith, and not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Now, as our journey forward continues and we once again approach Holy Week and Easter, I write to you to remove the remaining restrictions on our practices of worship. As detailed in the accompanying guidelines, congregational leadership will once again have the option of distributing the wine of communion by a shared chalice. For some, this will be a welcome option that will be implemented immediately. For others, it will seem as if we are rushing too quickly, and they will choose to wait for a time. To be honest, it has been a reality of our life as Diocese that each of us has navigated this pandemic journey at our own speed, as has every individual in eastern North Carolina and in the wider world.

In whatever ways you will observe Maundy Thursday this year, I hope that you hear the words of Jesus from the thirteenth chapter of John’s gospel. After his meal with them, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, in an act of servanthood, and then said to them, “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:15) Later, after Judas had gone out, he said to them, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

As we continue the journey forward, I pray that by our words and by our actions it will be clear to “everyone” that we are disciples of Jesus, that our love for one another and for all of God’s children will be even more contagious than any virus we may encounter!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob".

Rob Skirving

Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

The Journey Forward – Guidelines for Public Worship

The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina
March 31, 2022

*These guidelines build on the pattern we have followed for two years,
adapted for use as we “journey forward”
into what lies ahead for us and for God’s Church.*

Local Leadership

- ❖ Clergy and churchwardens, working together and with other leadership in a congregation, will continue to have the responsibility for shaping local protocols for worship, within the rubrics of authorized liturgical resources and the guidelines of the Diocese of East Carolina published here and in the future.
- ❖ In establishing protocols for their congregation, clergy and churchwardens should regularly monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 within their own county. The Center for Disease Control provides a useful, regularly updated resource for this purpose, one that includes recommended steps for preventing the spread of COVID. This resource is titled **COVID-19 by County** and can be found at the following link:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>
- ❖ As we journey forward, there may be times when clergy and churchwardens should properly decide to implement more restrictive protocol for their congregational life for a time, including protocols regarding physical spacing and masking. Remember to communicate effectively with the members of your congregation!
- ❖ Congregations are still welcome to offer a variety of alternatives for their people, including worship options that are in-person or online, indoors or outdoors.
- ❖ In all decisions, congregations should carefully consider the needs of those who are most vulnerable, including our children, those who are immunocompromised and those who cannot be vaccinated, for one reason or another. At the same time, none of our options for public worship should require that people be asked to demonstrate their vaccination status.
- ❖ Congregational members should be reminded to stay home when they are sick, and in all things to be respectful of others whose choices might be different than their own.

Celebrating the Holy Eucharist

- ❖ As a sign of hospitality, Clergy and Lay Eucharistic Ministers should consider choosing to be masked while setting the table, while celebrating the Eucharist and while distributing

the Eucharistic elements. Efforts should always be made to minimize the number of people having contact with Eucharistic vessels or elements. The use of hand sanitizer should still be expected for those involved in celebrations of the Eucharist.

- ❖ When "setting the table" for the Eucharist, besides the bread there should be a single chalice along with a single cruet/flagon of an appropriate size to contain enough wine for distribution to the whole congregation. Trays of individual small cups should not be on the altar during prayers of consecration. Bread need not be individually wrapped in plastic, as some have been doing.
- ❖ In the distribution of the bread and wine of communion, there may be as many stations as needed, whether at the altar rail or at other appropriate places around the gathering space. Optimally, those preferring to maintain physical spacing will be given an appropriate option for receiving communion.
- ❖ Congregations are encouraged to return to offering wine at communion, if they have not yet done so. Wine is to be distributed in one or more of the following ways:
 - By sipping from a shared chalice, served by properly trained Eucharistic ministers using the best practices of turning and wiping the chalice after each person.
 - By the use of small, individual cups filled from the cruet/flagon that was on the altar, according to the pattern introduced in the Worship Guidelines put in place on September 29, 2021.
 - By intinction, only when properly trained Eucharistic ministers can safely assist communicants to receive the bread and then dip it into the wine themselves, without their fingers having contact with the wine.

Note: A congregation may certainly choose not to offer intinction.
- ❖ Members of our worshipping communities should be reminded that receiving communion in one form only is always an option, and that they may individually refrain from sharing the wine of communion until they are ready.

Other Practices

- ❖ All other congregational practices with respect to worship, formation ministries and fellowship should be planned in keeping with relevant CDC guidelines. Due caution should be exercised to protect the health and well-being of all who will attend.

**Guidelines are effective as of March 31, 2022
and will remain in effect until such time as they are replaced or removed.**