



# THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

March 2, 2022

Dear faithful people of the Diocese of South Carolina,

It brings me joy and relief to continue to see a significant decrease in the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths throughout our diocese. I hope and pray that this decrease will continue. In light of these developments, I believe we are ready to modify our guidelines. I am also mindful, however, that there are those among us, particularly those with immunosuppression, those who are elderly, and those who are, for a variety of reasons, unvaccinated, who remain at high risk. I ask you to consider prayerfully how best to make adjustments in your particular context in a way that seriously takes into account the needs of those among us who remain most vulnerable. As a reminder, we have always and will continue to base our guidance on science, through consultations with medical professionals in our communities and consideration of CDC-issued policy, coupled with our desire to follow Christ's commandment to love our neighbors.

Throughout this pandemic, the key tools at our disposal when managing in-person gatherings have been and continue to be vaccinations, masks, and self-isolation when there is any question of infection. As we move forward, I ask you to keep in mind the following:

1. **Vaccines:** Our policy concerning vaccinations has not changed. The science shows they save lives, and we will continue to encourage all of our members to get vaccinated and boosted as recommended by the CDC, and to expect proof of vaccination for those engaging in overnight events sponsored by the Diocese.
2. **Masks:** The CDC has modified their mask policy by county based on the number of hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases. You can find your "[COVID-19 Community Level](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html)" at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>. I encourage the leadership of each congregation to use this tool, as well as their assessment of the vulnerability of their congregation, to determine the mask policy appropriate for your services and in-person gatherings such as Sunday School and church meetings. While we are all eager to forego masks, I would hasten to underscore the following facts as you make decisions that take your specific context into account: Unvaccinated persons and the 3-4% of adults who are too immunosuppressed to respond at all to vaccines who worship indoors in a parish that elects to stop masking are very much at risk to get COVID-19, a disease that even among the young & vaccinated is enough to make most people who get it too sick to work for a week or more and poses greater risks to those with other complicating risk factors. I am asking you to consider this reality in light of your particular community as you determine what practices best enact love of neighbor in your setting. There is, unfortunately, no one-size-fits-all answer to the matter of doing this risk/benefit analysis.

3. **Self-Quarantine when illness is suspected:** We continue to urge anyone who suspects they are ill with COVID-19 or believes they might have been in close proximity to someone who has the virus to remain at home for the quarantine period recommended by the CDC ([Learn more at this link](#)).
4. **Church-sponsored social events:** We are thankful that we are now able to gather for social events, sharing food, and fellowship. However, it is still advisable to consider keeping events on the small side when fully indoors, and hosting large gatherings outside, weather permitting.
5. **Communion/The Common Cup:** It has been more than two years since we have participated in communion of two kinds. There is not substantive medical evidence to suggest that it safe to partake of the common cup in our context. We simply lack scientific information that informs one way or the other the risks of chalice-sharing during COVID-19 pandemic. This is an infection that is highly present in saliva. While there have been studies conducted in past decades that indicate transmission of disease through the common cup is rare, we do not have data on that question for this current pandemic. We are therefore in the position of making decisions without scientific reassurance, when it comes to the matter of returning to the common cup. I therefore **strongly recommend** the practice of intinction, administered by the Eucharistic Minister (not with self-intinction by individual communicants) as the safest method of receiving the wine. That said, and understanding the strong desire many of you have to move forward in light of current numbers to offer the common cup again, I will support congregations that practice communion in one or two kinds. I ask that local leaders make this determination, taking into account factors such as the identified community risk level in your local community, as well as indicators within your congregation that can inform the most prudent, pastoral course for you in your setting. If you return to the common cup, I would urge you to make clear that communion in one kind is a complete reception of the sacrament, and I would ask that you make intinction (offered in a safe way with a separate cup) always available as an option.

Please keep in mind that CDC community risk levels take into account three key metrics:

- New COVID-19-related hospitalizations over a seven-day period;
- The percentage of inpatient beds currently occupied by COVID-19 patients; and
- The total number of new cases in the community over the past seven days.

These metrics focus attention on what risk level a community can sustain without overtaxing hospitals and medical resources. This focus is important for us to keep in view, as our actions may impact our neighbors who have other medical needs that cannot be properly addressed should medical resources become overwhelmed.

I want to reiterate, that as we contemplate a path that will allow us to return to church services and gatherings as we held them prior to the pandemic, it is important to remember that some people in our congregations may not be ready to attend without a mask or participate in a common cup. I expect all congregations will ensure all feel welcome to attend and practice the precautions they believe are necessary. Showing respect for their precautions is a way of loving our neighbor. Also, we should be especially mindful of those in our congregations who are immunocompromised or facing a greater risk to COVID-19 than most others. I ask that you make reasonable accommodations as possible and appropriate to ensure that all are welcome.

We hope that this step is yet another one that will bring us back to a day when we can all gather safely together again, with significantly decreased concern about COVID-19. I am grateful for the tremendous care for others you have continually demonstrated throughout this pandemic. Your prayers and patience have been greatly appreciated.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized initial 'R' with a cross symbol inside it, followed by the name 'Ruth' in a cursive script.

The Rt. Rev. Ruth Woodliff-Stanley  
Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina