

May 10, 2021

Over the last few weeks, the Governor of Virginia and the CDC have updated guidance for in-person gatherings and mask requirements for fully vaccinated individuals. As leaders discern the next steps for their congregations, the Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop encourages everyone to remain steadfast in their resolve to love their neighbor and to create a culture of safety and care as you develop plans for in-person gatherings, including worship.

Current guidance from Governor Northam, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Virginia Department of Health can be found at:

- Governor of Virginia
 - Office of the Governor Current Guidelines are available at: <https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus/forwardvirginia/>
 - Office of the Governor Amended Executive Order 72 addressing COVID-19 Restrictions can be found at: <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/executive-actions/>
- Virginia Department of Health
 - Guidance for Schools, Workplaces, and Community Locations can be found at: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/>
 - COVID-19 in Virginia Dashboard: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-in-virginia/>
- Centers for Disease Control
 - CDC Guidance for Community, Work, and School: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>
 - CDC Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

Over the last 14 months, congregations and leaders have worked hard to keep one another safe. In the days and weeks ahead, please continue to stay careful as you gather for worship and other ministry moments in-person. Encourage those who are sick to remain at home. Continue to wear a mask in group settings. Wash your hands. Remain six feet apart. Consider having choral singing with masked, fully vaccinated persons instead of congregational singing. If you chose to share communion, think carefully about your method of presiding and distribution. Encourage everyone who is able, to get vaccinated. The goal of controlling the pandemic in Virginia is in sight, but it will take everyone's assistance to get there.

These continue to be stressful days, and we, in the Office of the Bishop, know that you are engaged in hard decisions. We are keeping you in our prayers. We encourage you to remember one another in prayer, to care for your siblings in Christ, and to support one another, especially your leaders, in this stressful time. If you think the Office of the Bishop can be helpful, feel free to contact us.

