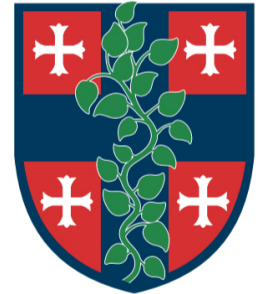


# Episcopal Church of New Hampshire

June 23, 2021



Blessings to All,

I offer my profound thanks for the leadership of our clergy, pastoral leaders, and wardens during the last 14 months as we have grieved and grown together through this pandemic. I am grateful for their — and your — faithful willingness to stay home and limit in-person gatherings while we have also created opportunities to worship virtually, focused on formation, and found new ways to serve neighbors. I am amazed by the ways that, together, we innovated and even thrived during this time! I know how tired we all are. I also trust that the joy of beginning to regather will refresh and replenish us all.

**I am writing today to announce that as of this date the diocese will no longer require churches to follow diocesan-wide restrictions for in-person gatherings in the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire.** Given high rates of vaccination among our church members, the availability of vaccination to everyone age 12 and older, and the low rates of COVID19 across our state, we will no longer impose requirements around masks, distancing, singing, or distribution of Holy Eucharist.

The guidelines we have posted on our COVID19 webpage will continue to serve as a resource for local church decision making. All of us now have access to information about vaccination and best practices. You, our church members, are able to make well-informed decisions in support of your personal health and the well-being of our congregations. I have asked the Short Term COVID19 Response Team to reconvene as needed and we may re-impose restrictions on gathering if infections rates rise to unsafe levels again.

**Just because our church leaders are not required to mandate masks or distancing does not, however, mean they can't continue to implement these requirements at a local level.** Church leaders will continue to monitor local virus rates and make decisions based on the needs of your community. Clergy and church leaders who conclude that practices such as masking, distancing, outdoor worship, or communion in one kind will better serve their local context have the full support of the Diocese.

**Please pay special attention to the following:**

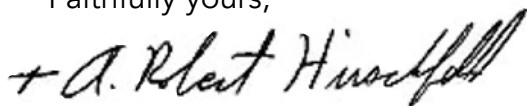
- Although churches may decide to no longer require masks it should also be clear that masks are welcome for those who prefer them. Let's establish a culture where people are comfortable wearing masks, for any reason.
- Churches may now offer wine in the common cup (intinction is discouraged however). If wine is offered, churches will make sure that it is understood that communion in one kind is entirely appropriate. Let's foster a church culture where people are comfortable crossing their arms on their chests as the wine is distributed, for any reason.
- Clergy and church leaders will consult directly with families with children under 12 before they make decisions about how to approach mask wearing, distancing, or worshipping indoors. Let's nurture a culture where children are protected, even if we need to wear masks in certain situations.
- Churches will continue to offer online worship options as they are able. Let's promote a culture where people feel like welcomed worshippers whether they are in-person or online.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Short Term COVID19 Response Team, with leadership from the Revs. Chip Robinson and Curtis Metzger, for leading our response to the pandemic. I also want to express my gratitude and thankfulness for the faithful kindness, patience, and love for others you have all demonstrated during this time.

*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you ... And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*

Philippians 3-4, 9-11

Faithfully yours,



The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld

