

December 13, 2022

Dear Clergy and Wardens,

Thank you for all that you are doing to prepare to greet guests and parish families during this holiday season. This promises to be a joyful time as people gather and share in the wonders of Christmas and the pleasures of being together.

Because we are experiencing more times of being together, COVID, RSV and the flu are also more in evidence. In California, counties in various parts of the state and particularly our diocese report an uptick in COVID cases and warn of respiratory ailments and the flu. Additionally, during the holiday season, more people gather from various parts of the country and the world, where vaccination rates may be lower, and contagion may be higher.

It is very important, over these next eight weeks, for each parish to track county levels of risk for COVID (as this is an important indicator), which include not only cases and deaths, but also vaccination rates. In keeping with that, you will want to consider your plans for wearing of masks, keeping social distance and other protocols.

Please be proactive, and consider the following:

- When inside, it is a good idea to continue to wear masks and practice social distancing. The guidelines are clear that the elderly and the young remain vulnerable. Additionally, be mindful of parents and grandparents who are trying to protect the health of babies and toddlers.
- When you have the opportunity, gather outside as much as possible. Introduce small, non-masked indoor meetings where everyone is known and vaccinated—and only if all in the small group agree to being non-masked.
- Be respectful of those who are anxious about being in groups of people, and most especially those who express hesitancy about coming to in-person worship. Being in a room full of unmasked people can be overwhelming. Be mindful of those whose medical conditions you may know nothing about. Don't assume that everyone who has been in attendance is healthy or not at-risk. There is need for pastoral care to learn about why some may be hesitant or anxious.
- Be careful of group singing unmasked indoors. Singing generates the aerosol effect that does spread COVID. You will need to talk very carefully with your musicians about how to handle choral singing. I am reminded that the choir of 500 of St. Olaf's College sang the entire concert in masks, and they hit all their notes and sounded glorious.

As leaders in our parishes and diocese, let us do our best to share the wonders of the season in a safe and thoughtful manner.

Faithfully,

+Lucinda