



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

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March 3, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we spend another Lent unlike any other, we do so with a sense of tentative optimism and measured hope for what the future holds.

Last summer, our In-Person Gathering Team worked to establish guidelines for how and when we would begin the process of gathering in-person. We then held several outdoor worship services in the fall.

With warming weather, we looked to resume our in-person gatherings at Deming Park beginning Easter morning. We anticipate being able to continue gathering in-person and online through the Easter Season.

We are now in a season of penitence, but there is much to celebrate, including the arrival of the vaccine into our community and the dramatic decrease in the infection rate. Our cases per 100k rate is still considered "at risk" and far exceeds the level Johns Hopkins recommends; however, we are seeing positive signs that far exceed our expectations just a few month ago.

Because of the weather and the comparative safety of the outdoors, gathering outside this spring will continue to be the guidance of the Gathering Team at this time.

In spite of the good news, there are two factors that keep us apprehensive. First is the anticipation of the already discovered variant strains making their way into our community. Since the beginning of the year, the projection was that we may be seeing them here in **March**. So even as our numbers have been in dramatic decline through February, with a new uptick this week, the opportunity for a turn

unrelated to vaccination has us preparing carefully now with the potential for much more gathering if the threat does not materialize.

Secondly, while many of our members have already been vaccinated, many, including the Rector, are not. We are buoyed by the news that this may come before the end of May. Our eagerness to be in each other's presence must continue to be based on the generous expression of safety: not just to our oldest members, but also to our families, particularly those with young or at-risk children.

We will continue to meet on Zoom, live-streamed to Facebook and YouTube on Sundays through Lent. Then on Easter morning, we will gather at Deming at 10:00 am. We will also offer a concurrent recorded service online. All in-person gatherings will require masks and social distancing. **We will continue with this schedule for the time being and will revisit it again in the coming weeks.**

While many of us are eager to return to the building and in-person worship, we are all doing so at different stages and with different opportunities. Please remember that there is nothing preventing individuals from gathering (with proper distancing).

If you need assistance getting your vaccination scheduled, we will gladly help get you connected.

We continue to follow the guidance of health experts and Diocesan leadership who remind us to serve our community safely and respectfully.

Grace and Peace,

The In-Person Gathering Team

Linda Airhart, Dennis Dieken, John Hegedus, Geoff Wayton, Robin Willis,
The Rev. Deby Veach, The Rev. Andrew Downs