



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

September 3, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

At the direction of our Bishop, St. Stephen's put together a team in May to keep up with the spread of the coronavirus in Vigo County and plan for our eventual strategy for safely regathering. We met on Zoom and communicated regularly.

In June and July, we surveyed the congregation online and by mail. A significant majority of responses were not eager to return to in-person worship right away. The group discussed alternative arrangements, settling on the creation of an in-person weekday service.

We had the Air Conditioning inspected and received recommendations for improvements for the air flow of the nave.

A first draft of a regathering plan was brought to the vestry's July meeting. After several recommendations were offered, a second plan was drawn up from the plans of All Saints' (Indianapolis) and St. John's (Lafayette) and presented at the August meeting.

The vestry is now sending the plan to the Diocese for approval. Please note that until it is approved by the Diocese, it is a DRAFT proposal.

As we're sure you know, this was a difficult process for us. The primary indicator used for determining the relative safety of reopening is the infection rate, or R-naught (R0). Rather than the sheer number of infections, R0 tells us how many or few other people each infected person is infecting. If it is above 1.0, it means each person infects more than one person. This week, we are at 1.11, which is considered "high".

According to the CovidActNow website:

"Over the last week, Vigo County, Indiana has averaged 38 new confirmed cases per day (**35.2** for every 100,000 residents). Over the next year, this translates to around 14,000 cases and an [estimated](#) 69,000 infections (64.3% of the population)."

While we know this has been a challenging five months for us all, and in spite of having many friends attending church in-person just across the street, our numbers do not meet the benchmarks set out by the diocese for in-person gathering. Had the trend in late May continued, there is little doubt that we would be gathering in some capacity now. But it didn't. The infection rate shot up to dangerous levels.

It is therefore our recommendation that we continue to gather for worship online only until the rate of infection meets the diocesan guidelines. Small gatherings, properly-masked and socially distanced may be considered, especially in the garden or at a park. When we are in a position to gather in relative safety, we now have the guidelines that will inform our practice.

Our regathering team will continue to monitor the infection rate and keep the congregation up to date.

In gratitude,

St. Stephen's Regathering Team

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