



# St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

---

215 North 7th Street  
Terre Haute IN 47807  
(812) 232-5165  
rector@ststephensth.org

September 29, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

This is our best window. COVID numbers are down, the weather is (hopefully) cooperating. If you are eager to gather in-person, we will be experimenting for the next few weeks with in-person worship at Deming Park.

If you plan to attend, here are five things you must do to ensure your health and the health of those around you.

1. **Register.** This will allow us to track not only how many people (keeping the numbers manageable) but assist in contact tracing if necessary. You can do this by visiting <https://reopen.church/r/bz1nK6kj> or calling Peggy Allen at 812-239-6826.
2. **Wear a mask.** This is non-negotiable. Please prepare ahead to ensure that we may continue such gatherings.
3. **Maintain social distance.** The basic rule is 6 feet. Families can sit together, but keep distance between family units.
4. **Bring a chair and the order of worship.** By bringing your own, you minimize the physical contact and the sanitizing requirements. In other words, if everyone brings their own, it is easier for all of us.
5. **Bring some bread.** A piece, slice, roll, or even loaf. Here's why:

We will be celebrating an unconventional Eucharist. One that draws as much on our experience of separation and time in the wilderness as the Exodus story of Manna and our daily bread to serve both our need to feast on what we have gone without, but also in a way that minimizes physical contact. So each of us is bringing an offering to this feast. Not in the way we are used to, but in a way that will allow us to gather, creatively and selflessly.

There's an added advantage to gathering in the park on October 4. We can also celebrate the Feast of St. Francis with a pet blessing. So the friends you normally don't bring to church each week are welcome to join us this time!

Lastly, I'd like to make it perfectly clear that gathering in-person is not required, nor will it replace our online gathering. I have spent months exploring all of the options available to us and agonizing over the process. Many of you have joined me in exploring them. And given our present capacity, needs, and values, we have decided to offer concurrent services at this time. This will allow us to have some adaptive, in-person worship services while also continuing to gather online with the *intimate* worship experience we've come to appreciate. This will allow our two services to offer *different* experiences based on *different* needs. And while I would prefer we gathered for one worship experience together, offering these concurrent services will help us offer *more* of what we want.

If you are on the fence about joining us in the park, please don't feel obligated. Instead, consider this simple idea. As we have reoriented our thinking throughout this pandemic, from seeing masks as a way of protecting ourselves toward their *also* being a means of protecting others; the same is true for our desire to gather in-person. Many of us have said that it is our choice whether or not to come, because we are used to orienting our thinking toward our own behavior. But *your* safety is not the only concern. *Our* safety is of equal concern. As I have said from the very beginning, our church *must* be a source of life. Which also means we must guard against it being a source that takes it away. And while we cannot ensure that we are being totally safe, we must make it *just as clear* that gathering digitally is effective, affirming of our faith, and a means of ensuring we can create more room for life, safety, and joy, even in the midst of a pandemic. And even one that has already tried our patience and will continue to stretch into our near future.

Remember, this is our wilderness time. Not a time for grumbling and assuming the worst. But of trust in the one who saves us. Who provides manna. The very means of life.

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. Andrew Downs

Rector, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church