



May 20, 2021

Dear St. Helena's Family & Friends,

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* – I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Since March, 2020, we have been on a challenging journey together as we navigated the wilderness of a worldwide pandemic. Together we have walked a narrow path as we sought to do as much ministry as possible while keeping the most vulnerable members of our community safe. We are extremely grateful for your perseverance, endurance, and generosity throughout this trek. Thanks be to God, our wilderness wandering is nearing an end. The promised land is in sight. We write to you to share some significant revisions to the pandemic precautions our parish family has been practicing for over a year.

As we adjust our practices, we continue to monitor local conditions, follow the guidelines of the CDC, and be guided by the pastoral direction of our Bishop. Throughout this pandemic we have sought to love our neighbors and respect the decisions of individuals and families. These must continue to be our values in the months ahead. Our congregation is a large, extended family. We have not all been vaccinated. Vaccines are not yet available for the youngest members of our family. We are not of one mind regarding the wearing of masks, shaking of hands, and receiving of communion. Some of us are ready to move forward to remove all restrictions with rejoicing and see this development as a true invitation to comfortably return to worship and the relational connections they have missed. Others are more hesitant, and will want to keep practicing some safety measures. In this next stage of our journey, we must have empathy and understanding for all the members of our parish family, and respect their decisions regarding their health and comfort levels. We are reminded of St. Paul's words to the Christians in Rome: 'Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.'

Here are some current practices that will continue:

- We will continue to encourage the use of hand sanitizer when you enter any building on our campus, and we will maintain these stations for the foreseeable future.
- We will continue to open doors or windows in worship spaces and gathering places to increase the circulation of fresh air.
- We will continue to livestream our 9:00am worship service for those who are homebound or not comfortable in large gatherings.
- We will continue to take the temperatures of children entering our childcare facilities, and our nursery staff will continue to wear masks indoors.

**Beginning May 23**, based on local conditions, CDC guidelines, and diocesan policies, the Vestry has adopted the following adjustments to our current practices:

- Fully vaccinated individuals are no longer required to wear a mask or physically distance indoors or outdoors on church premises. This includes worship services, Bible studies, ministry meetings, and fellowship. St. Helena's leadership will NOT ask for proof of vaccination. We encourage each individual to make the right decision for their own situation and health condition.
- We strongly encourage individuals who are not fully vaccinated to wear masks indoors and maintain physical distances of 6-feet.
- While respecting each person's decision, we encourage people to receive the COVID-19 vaccination that is available to them at many locations in the area.
- When greeting or passing the peace, be sensitive to the reality that some of our family members may be ready to embrace while others may still desire to fist bump or wave.
- At 7:45am and 11:00am, we will return to the practice of distributing communion at the altar rail. The Clergy will continue to wear masks during the distribution of communion.
- Coffee and refreshments may be served indoors.
- During the weeks and months ahead, we will introduce more congregational singing into our 9:00am and 11:00am worship services.
- We will reintroduce the habit of sharing our names by wearing nametags.

**Beginning June 6**, we will once again offer communion in both kinds. Wine will be administered through intinction only, and more procedural details will be explained at that time. Clergy and Lay Eucharistic Ministers will wear masks during distribution of communion.

This has been a long journey with many detours and surprises. Along this road we have witnessed incredible acts of faithful service as ministry leaders adapted and served under challenging circumstances, and we have learned much about ourselves and our Lord. As we enter the home stretch of the race that is set before us, we join Bishop Reed in quoting the words of a familiar hymn. *Through many dangers, toils, and snares, we have already come. 'Tis grace that brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.*

Peace,

*Matt*

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Matt Boutte, Senior Warden

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The Rev. David G. Read, Rector