



St. John's Episcopal Church
One North Market Street, P. O. Box 395
Johnstown, New York 12095
(518) 762-9210
stjohnschurch@frontiernet.net
www.stjohnsjohnstown.org

Covid 19 Updates—June 20, 2021

We have been blessed to learn that the Standing Committee has relaxed the mandates on our churches due to the complete re-opening of New York State upon reaching the 70% vaccination rate. This is exciting news, and we will be making some changes at St. John's Church as a result. However, we will also be cautious as we move forward, and changes will happen in phases.

An important statistic to note as we move forward:

Fulton County is only 37% vaccinated. 42% have received at least one dose.

This is far below the state average of 70% and this will be a guiding principle for some of the safeguards that will remain in place.

As of Sunday, June 20, 2021, these changes will take place:

Mask mandate:

Vaccinated people do not have to wear a mask *except* to Communion.

Unvaccinated people are encouraged to keep wearing their masks, and *must* wear them to receive Communion.

Singing: We can sing! Once again, our caution is for those who are unvaccinated, so people are asked to consider their vaccination status before removing masks to sing.

Social Distancing: Restrictions are removed, and the Happy Faces on the pews will be removed.

Pews: Ribbons will not be completely removed, but they will no longer restrict people from sitting where they choose in the church.

Passing the Plate/Passing the Peace: Both remain suspended due to the low vaccination rate in Fulton County.

Communion: Everyone, including the Rector, will wear masks to receive Communion. We will continue to receive in a single line at the center of the aisle.

The Chalice: We are a church of the common cup, and with low vaccination rates, we cannot yet share the cup in church. Mother Laurie is happy to bring communion, including wine, to individual houses for porch communion, however, so consider this option if you are interested in receiving communion in both kinds.

Coffee Hour: We are able to resume Coffee Hour in our building, but will continue to have lemonade on the lawn for the summer.

Some questions you might have:

Q: Mother Laurie, this seems awfully abrupt. Do we need all this change right now?

A: This is a good time to try out some of these new changes when the church windows and doors are open and we have the opportunity to create a safer, airier environment. Having said that, the Standing Committee only let us know on Thursday, so we have moved quickly to adapt to make some changes we feel safe making.

Q: Why not the common cup (or chalice)?

A: As I mentioned, the vaccination rate is just too low for us to take that risk at this time. My question to you—if you knew someone was drinking from a cup—ANY cup—and they tested positive for Covid-19 but had no symptoms, would you drink from that cup willingly? The problem is that with a low vaccination rate, we can't be sure who has been exposed to the virus and our job is to *protect* people, not make them feel like they have to take a risk simply to receive communion. Even though I am vaccinated, I would not drink from a cup that a Covid-positive person had been drinking from. I wouldn't take the chance. Jesus doesn't magically remove all the germs and viruses from our churches just because we have faith in him. He has faith in us to take care of each other, and to make good decisions.

Q: I miss the peace soooooo much!!

A: Many people do, I can sympathize. But once we start shaking hands and hugging in church, we are taking risks that we don't yet need to take.

Q: How about kneeling at the Altar Rail to receive communion?

A: Not quite yet. But soon (see below).

Q: Well, WHEN then? I am really tired of all these restrictions and I am tired of waiting!

A: Totally agree!!! These restrictions have become a routine we follow, but this isn't how we want to be in church forever!! Here's my thinking—let's keep monitoring the vaccination rates over the summer and we'll make some of these decisions in the fall.

Q: My question is very different—I used to feel safe in church, and now these changes make me feel unsafe again! What am I supposed to do?

A: That is hard, you're right. You can still sit in a socially distant pew; we'll have plenty of those available. You can continue to wear your mask and sit near the open door in the back or near a window for better ventilation. You can also watch online, but I know that's not the same.

Q: I'm still angry because I thought the church sold out when all these restrictions went into effect.

A: I hear your frustration, but from the very beginning our criteria has been to keep people safe using the best information available to us. We didn't just 'cave in' to the government or the Diocese. We did our own research into best practices by interviewing doctors who were both church attenders and experienced practitioners. And St. John's was one of the churches (dare I say the first and most vocal??) to appeal to the then-Bishop to show him that we were confident we could keep people safe AND still worship. Our safety plan and video were widely viewed by other churches for this reason, and our practices were safe.

And yet we know there is no guarantee about safety even in your own home!!! Jesus spent so much of his ministry healing the sick and bringing them back to health. Our job is to help people gain good spiritual health, and one of the ways we do that is by caring for them in body, mind and soul. Being good stewards of our bodies and relationships helps keep us healthy overall.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns about any of these changes. Our goal is to worship God with our whole hearts, minds, bodies and souls—so we have to care for all of those!

Blessings and grace,

ML+

Rev. L. M. Garramone

Rector, St. John's Episcopal Church

Revlmgr@gmail.com

Cell: (518) 469-8757