

Dear Parish Family,

We have been waiting for a few weeks for some sort of safety guidelines changes regarding church gatherings and the surge of the omicron variant. Davidson County is reporting a positivity rate over 13%, with 7.5% being our diocesan threshold for decision making.

Bishop Sam Rodman has determined that in-person worship is not recommended through [Sunday, January 16](#). While he is leaving the ultimate decision to each locality, the spirit of the recommendation calls us to walk in accord with his wisdom.

Therefore, we will be live streaming on [Sunday, January 2](#), January 9, and January 16. If allowed, we will open Grace's doors on [Sunday, January 23](#) - following carefully any guidelines for such reopening. If anyone is determined to come on any of these next 3 Sundays, it is technically allowable, though careful masking and distancing will be observed. There will be no singing by anyone whatsoever during these weeks.

We had planned a combined Epiphany and New Rector Installation Service on January 5. That service will not be held. Instead, Bishop Rodman will install the new Rector on [Sunday, April 24](#) when he comes to celebrate our parish's 200th Anniversary the same day. That is something wonderful to look forward to!

Here is a summary of how we are to go forward.

1. We will be live streaming for 3 Sundays, through [January 16](#), resuming full in-person worship on [January 23](#), if allowed.
2. If anyone is determined to worship in-person during these weeks, they will need to be masked and distanced.
3. There will be no singing by anyone during this time. Our intrepid Organist will be playing instrumentally if she desires.
4. The [January 5](#) combined Epiphany/New Rector Service is postponed. There will be no Epiphany Service on [January 6](#).
5. The new Rector installation will be combined with our 200th Anniversary celebration on [Sunday, April 24](#). A fabulous day to be anticipated!
6. In person gatherings for meetings and activities likewise will be limited over these next few weeks.
7. Any other concerns or decisions not addressed here can be put before me directly and I will immediately respond.

The entirety of the Bishop's message follows this notice. It would be good for you all to read it and be in step with what is transpiring.

Here is a gentle assignment for all of us. During this time of diminished gathering, please call one another, email one another, and find ways to love and serve one another specially. There are many among us who live alone and depend on church activities for their fellowship and well-being. We can still be "the Church" whether we are physically meeting or not. We have learned this lesson well over the past year or two.

This is not a huge setback for us. While Grace's spirit, participation, attendance, and ministry have all been surging over the past months, we know in faith and trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to prosper our ministries and missions during these 3 weeks and beyond!

To God be the glory!

**In Jesus' love for you all,
Ed+**

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Updated COVID-19 Protocols

WORSHIP

Currently, the positivity rate for COVID-19 is over 7.5% in most of the Diocese. Due to the anticipated surge in COVID-19 cases in January following holiday travel and gatherings, and exacerbated by the highly transmissible nature of the omicron variant, these county by county rates are likely to continue to rise. Though the daily number of new cases will likely rival and perhaps exceed the peak of last winter, hospitalizations and deaths are not increasing at the same rate. The rate of transmission will still present significant challenges to our healthcare systems. Even mild cases make many people very, very sick. (See attached PowerPoint from Wes Wallace, UNC School of Medicine.) Therefore, in-person worship is not recommended for the next three weeks, through **Sunday, January 16**, but we are not prohibiting such gatherings. Rather, we leave that to local discernment, where we recommend you pay close attention to anticipated trends in positivity rates and hospitalization rates in your county.

For those who choose to host in-person worship and/or attend in-person worship, please enforce the already mandated masking for all, as well as social distancing protocols.

Outdoor worship may be conducted, weather permitting, with masks and social distancing mandatory and following the relevant Stage 3 protocols for outdoor worship.

Bishops' visits for the first three weeks of January will be either livestreamed, held outdoors or remote. Each bishop will work out the specifics with the rector/vicar in advance of their visit.

INDOOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Indoor fellowship events or meetings of more than 10 people are not recommended. For small indoor gatherings, masks and social distancing are required. Serving of food and beverages is prohibited for the next three weeks, through **Sunday January 16**. Church staff may continue to come to offices using heightened vigilance around the importance of masks, social distancing, handwashing and other preventative measures. Direct service offerings may continue with proper precautions and protocols.

FUNERALS, WEDDINGS AND BAPTISMS

Funerals, if at all possible, should be delayed until after this three-week period. If you need to move forward, we ask you do so with strict adherence to the risk reduction protocols.

Please consult with Bishop Sam Rodman regarding any baptisms or weddings scheduled for January.

CHOIR AND CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

Indoor choir rehearsals and indoor congregational singing are prohibited.

LIVESTREAMING

Worship teams of no more than 10 may gather indoors to record and/or livestream worship. Singing is prohibited. Masks and social distancing are required, as is following all other relevant Stage 3 protocols.

In any discrepancies between this update and the attached Stage 3 guidelines, the information in this update takes precedent.

This decision is difficult but necessary in light of the information we are receiving from public health channels. Though the data on the severity of illness caused by the omicron variant is mixed, we need to do everything in our power to protect our communities, including protecting the capacity of our hospitals to serve those in most need during this next phase of the pandemic.

Our hopes and prayers are that the anticipated surge will not be long or severe in its harm. We continue to discern the difficult calculus of keeping all people healthy in mind, body and spirit. We fully realize how important it is that people find ways to be together in worship and fellowship. Because this announcement is coming at a time when we are observing the Twelve Days of [Christmas](#), we understand that this is an inconvenient interruption to your plans, and we wish it were not so necessary.

Our Tuesday morning leadership calls resume [Tuesday, January 4, 2022](#). We will look forward to being with our lay and ordained leaders and working our way through this next chapter together.

We have come thus far by the grace of God and the goodwill of all the people of the Diocese of North Carolina. May God give us the courage to will and preserve in loving our neighbors as ourselves and, thereby, incarnating the Love of God in Jesus Christ.

**Yours in the peace of Jesus that calls to us over the tumult,
The Rt. Rev. Sam Rodman and the Rt. Rev. Anne Hodges-Copple**