

January 4, 2022

Pandemic Response: Urgent Update

As the pace of coronavirus transmission accelerates, driven by the omicron and delta variants, safeguarding public health and mitigating the risk of covid transmission becomes a Christian imperative. Accordingly: ***Effective immediately public worship is suspended in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. Individual parishes may, if desired, request an exception to enable gathering for worship so long as appropriate protocols are implemented.***

Mindful that statewide positivity now exceeds 25% and the number of coronavirus cases per 100,000 people exceeds 150, the Health Advisory Panel deems this course change essential. The rapidity with which the virus is spreading is breathtaking. Emergency Rooms are at or beyond capacity and are requesting that patients not come unless critically ill. Those patients who do visit ERs and Urgent Care facilities are facing extended wait times. Some must be transported across state lines to receive necessary care. Our health system is quaking, and our health care workers are overburdened. Unvaccinated people are extraordinarily vulnerable to the spread of the virus, and asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic people are unwitting spreaders. Breakthrough cases remind us that even the vaccinated may be vulnerable. Consequently, suspension of worship until further notice is necessary.

Requests for exceptions to the suspension may be submitted to Canon Roy Hoffman at rhoffman@diosova.org. Any such request will be evaluated on a parish by parish basis, but at minimum must require that masks be worn, physical distance be maintained, and contact tracing be assured. Parishes requesting an exception should document local transmission rates and their impact on local hospitals and urgent care facilities.

Our baptismal covenant to *seek and serve Christ in all persons and respect the dignity of every human being* is central to our commitment as Christians and lies at the heart of our response to the threat the pandemic poses. Together, we can and must do our part, trusting that “those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)