

ATTENTION: Churches in Convocations 1-5

Hampton Roads area sees huge surge in cases – July 29, 2020 re-gathering update

Today Governor Northam announced during a press conference that he is tightening restrictions in the Hampton Road areas to include no gatherings of greater than 50 people. As we are all aware, there has been a significant increase of coronavirus cases in Hampton Roads convincing the governor of the need to impose further restrictions.

Deeply concerned about the rise in cases in this part of our diocese, Bishop Susan Haynes and Canon Roy Hoffman met via Zoom on Monday evening with the medical/legal subgroup of the Advisory Panel for Re-gathering. We looked at the following metric:

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/key-measures/>

In the first graph, the seven-day moving average (in yellow) began descending around the middle to the end of May. By the middle of June we had the 14-day decline that we were waiting on in order to begin regathering. Then almost immediately after the fourth of July holiday, the numbers began to climb again so that now they are almost what they were before they started declining. If you look at the second graph which examines only the Northern part of the Commonwealth, you will see a flat line which means that cases are not increasing in that geographical area. If you look at the third graph that shows the Commonwealth with the Northern part removed, you will note that the curve rises to a level higher than it has ever been. Medical professionals interpret this curve (without the northern region) to indicate that coronavirus cases in Eastern Virginia are driving this upward surge.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the medical/legal subgroup and of the Diocesan office that **churches in the 757 area code/Hampton Roads area/Convocations 1-5 consider shutting down public worship until the numbers begin to decline again**. This decision can be made by the Rector or Priest-in-Charge alone or in consultation with the Vestry of the parish. At the very least, these churches should restrict their public gatherings to 50 or fewer. Virtual worship services, recorded or live-streamed in public buildings may continue as they did even in Phase 1.

This is a difficult place for us to be, we realize. We had hoped that when we re-gathered for worship, we would be doing so permanently. To have to take a step back is disheartening. But let us take up this cross again and do so for the sake of the well-being of our brothers and sisters, particularly the most vulnerable among us and those who care for them. Stay connected with each other, say your prayers every day, and remember that God loves you – for as the Epistle from Romans reminded us this past Sunday, nothing will be able to separate us from that love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.