



A LETTER FROM FR. BAILEY: MASK RESTRICTIONS

Friends,

On Thursday, the CDC issued a release easing the restrictions of wearing masks in both indoor and outdoor settings **for those who are fully vaccinated**. I will admit that my initial reaction was enthusiasm. Like many people, I have grown rather tired of wearing these things every time I go into a public place!

But I hope you've picked up on the fact that I will not set policy for the church based on my personal feelings or opinions. Our decision-making regarding masks has been based partly on the recommendations of scientific authorities but also on the comfort levels of people at St. Stephen's. Based on the survey we sent out a couple of months ago, our congregation is all over the map regarding their comfort and willingness in gathering in-person. The underlying strategy in your leadership's decision-making regarding restrictions for gatherings has been to move forward cautiously but with determination that, once we lift a restriction, we do not want them to return barring an absolutely unforeseen spike in cases. I repeat, our mission in these guidelines has NOT been about what the majority opinion wants but rather what is good for the physical, spiritual, and emotional health of the whole community of St. Stephen's.

The lifting of the mask mandate will now likely accelerate the easing of these restrictions. I have already solicited the Vestry for their opinions regarding when to go to the next phase and what that next phase will look like. Originally the next phase – set to begin in June – was to add to the numbers who could attend indoor worship and begin relaxing restrictions for masks outdoors. It seems clear that the next phase will now include relaxing mask restrictions at both indoor and outdoor worship services.

HOWEVER, I want to be clear that there are several families and individuals who have just begun attending in-person worship again partly *because* of our mask restrictions. In addition, I am waiting to see what parameters the Bishop will place upon us in light of this news.

As we wait for the Bishop's announcement and as we remain mindful of our fellow parishioners who understandably are more cautious, for this upcoming Sunday **the guidelines currently in place will stay in effect. Masks will be required at both indoor and outdoor services**. However I will allow the speaker (priest, preacher, lector) to remove their mask while they are leading worship as I know a number of people have had difficulty in hearing and understanding through the mask.



But I can propose with reasonable certainty that mask restrictions will be relaxed for our parish by the end of this month, if not sooner. **Please hold with this that relaxing restrictions does NOT mean that we are returning to "normal"**. A number of people in our congregation likely will still wear masks; we will continue for the foreseeable future to exercise distancing at both indoor and outdoor services; while the capacity will soon increase, we will continue to limit numbers in the Nave for a bit longer; and we will continue to urge you not to come at all if you have any symptoms of illness. After I get more feedback from the Vestry and from the Bishop, expect another announcement next week that will likely include revisions to our current guidelines.

In the meantime, I welcome your feedback, thoughts, or concerns. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me by phone 251-604-1705 or by email at revnorman1011@gmail.com.

I close with a reflection shared with me by a good friend and clergy colleague earlier this week. As we thankfully return to familiar patterns, also keep in mind that there are new people attending St. Stephen's since the pandemic began, and new elements of worship have been and will be coming to fruition. Whenever you do return to the warm presence of the Nave, don't simply return to the pew that was "yours". As my colleague pointed out, perhaps you can save it for the new people you haven't met yet or the ones that haven't yet come but may soon be here. Your pew actually might be a prime space for someone who is new to feel welcome and comfortable here. Just as we might think of offering our pews for someone new to join our fellowship, please remember that, in showing up to church, we are also offering our bodies to God in worship but also to each other in the trust that we have the best interests of our neighbors at heart.

Christ's Peace,

Bailey



St. Stephen's E-NEWS

...Where God is seen, love is felt and lives are changed!

May 14, 2021

7 Easter

Psalm 1

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

SUNDAY WORSHIP

This Sunday, May 16, 2021 is the 7th (and last) Sunday of Easter, and we will have two services of **MORNING PRAYER**. The 9 A.M. livestream/indoor worship in the Nave, will feature our youth, and we are delighted that Blair Thurston will be our high school senior preacher! The in-person, outdoors worship will be at 11:00 A.M. in the Grove. As a reminder, rain cancels the in-person worship.

EXTENDED TIME FOR MAKING RESERVATIONS

Reservations for **Sunday, May 23, 2021** will open at 5 P.M. on Sunday, May 16, 2021 and will remain open until Thursday, May 20, 2021, at 5 P.M. or until the max capacity is reached.

SUNDAY FELLOWSHIP

We look forward to seeing you on our Sunday Evening!
Evening Social Hour is at 5 p.m.

[Join Sunday Evening Social Hour](#)

Zoom Credentials:

Meeting ID: 829 7991 8885
Passcode: 799322



MEMORIAL DAY

MONDAY, MAY 31, 2021

The Parish Office will be **CLOSED** on Monday, May 31, 2021 in recognition of Memorial Day.



PASTORAL CARE

JOIN US AS WE PRAY THIS WEEK FOR:

Charmaine Hensley
Steve and Liz Herbes
Charlie and Nancy Higdon
Bob Hightower
Brad and Ashley Hillis, Thomas

Please include these people in your prayers.

EYF

Our end of year party will be directly after the 9:00 A.M. service. Parents and youth are welcome. We are doing the party potluck style and breakfast themed! Bring your best breakfast dish and some celebration. Please let me know if y'all need anything. Can't wait for Sunday!

~ Molly & Caleb Justice, Youth Co-coordinators



PENTECOST SUNDAY

THE DAY OF PENTECOST, MAY 23, 2021

PENTECOST celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples. This is the last liturgical season of the Church year until the beginning of Advent. According to episcopalchurch.org, "the term means 'the fiftieth day.' It is used in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the OT it refers to a feast of seven weeks known as the Feast of Weeks, an agricultural event that focused on the harvesting of first fruits. Josephus referred to Pentecost as the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover. The term is used in the New Testament to refer to the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), shortly after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension." The liturgical color for the feast is **RED**, so feel free to dress for the season!



BANNS OF MARRIAGE

I publish the Banns of Marriage between Emily Anne Bruner of Oak Ridge, Tennessee and Matthew Doane of Knoxville, Tennessee. If any of you know just cause why they may not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are bidden to declare it. This is the first time of asking. The wedding will be held on Saturday, May 29, 2021.



TUESDAY HEALING SERVICE

Our Tuesday spoken service has resumed, temporarily in the Parish Hall at 11:30 A.M. Please note that each week it will contain the special liturgy for **healing and prayers**, in addition to being a regular celebration of Holy Eucharist, Rite I. There are no reservations required - please wear masks and distance as much as you can.



TRINITY SUNDAY

TRINITY SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2021

Trinity Sunday is one of the seven principal feasts of the church year and celebrates "the one and equal glory" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "in Trinity of Persons and in Unity of Being" (BCP, p. 380). It is celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost.

