

Covid19 UPDATE – Re-opening Church Requirements

Dear St. Stephen's,

This week Bishop Jennifer Reddall and the Diocesan Task Force released their guidance for several phases of re-opening our churches. The full guidance information can be found on St. Stephen's website at www.ststephensaz.org/gathering-for-abundant-life. To summarize some of the key points, here is what we can expect as we move towards re-opening for worship and other activities:

- 1) **Churches cannot reopen until after May 25th AND after at least 14 days in your county of decreasing cases of new Covid19 infections.** Currently, Cochise County has been in that designation since April 14th. We were at a high then of 4 cases a day, then down to 3, then 2 and now we have only 1 new case every few days... IF THAT CONTINUES, we hope to reopen May 30th at 5pm and 31st at 10:30am.
- 2) **Attendance Limitations** – We may only have up to 36 people in person at any given service.
- 3) **Churches will need to follow specific protocols** when they reopen.
 - a. **MASKS ARE MANDATORY FOR ALL** – We will have masks to give to attenders who do not have their own masks. If you refuse to wear a mask, we will invite you to join us for our live-streaming service Sunday mornings from your home. In person, everyone wears masks
 - b. **DISTANCING of 6ft Required** – We will have certain pews blocked off to keep the 6ft minimum distance for folks.
 - c. **SANITIZATION of hands** – Hand Sanitizer will be at each entrance and required for all who come to worship.
 - d. **NO SINGING** – We will have music for our 10:30am Sunday service, but we are not allowed to sing. Singing projects our breath further from us and may endanger our neighbor in the pews.
 - e. **NO COFFEE HOUR FOOD/DRINKS** – To avoid further possible contagion spread, no food or drinks will be served. People may socialize 6ft apart and must continue to wear masks.
 - f. **COMMUNION IN BREAD/WAFER ONLY** – During the communion part of the service, bread wafers (gluten free and regular) will be offered by the priest. Everyone will stand, no kneeling at the rail, hand outstretched to receive the wafer, priest will extend arm to offer the wafer dropped into your hand, you move away, lift your mask and eat your wafer and then replace mask and return to your seat.
 - g. **NO PASSING THE PLATE** – Offertory baskets/plates will be placed near the entrances for you to drop your offering into. Do not touch the basket/plate if possible.
 - h. **NO TOUCH PEACE PASSING** – Remain 6ft apart and greet each other with a peace sign, namaste (prayer hands and bow), or virtual hug (arms crossed over chest).
 - i. **CLEANING OF SURFACES** – Following the service, some people will be asked to help sanitize the church: pews, doors, light switches, bathrooms, etc... Cleaning materials will be available in the Sacristy and Parish Hall.
 - j. **ONLINE LIVE STREAMING CONTINUES** – Because not everyone will feel comfortable coming back to church right away, we want to continue to make it possible for them to join in worship with us. Be aware therefore that you will be live, out to the world, during the 10:30am service.
- 4) **Expansion of Wed Morning Prayer Service** – We plan to offer Morning Prayer with communion and our Intercessory Prayers each Wednesday at 9:30am. This will be another opportunity to spread out and attend worship. SAME PROTOCOLS REQUIRED.

- 5) **What if COVID19 infection rates spike upwards in our county?** Should we see a resurgence in infection cases, we will follow the Governor's requirements. We may need to go back to staying home again for a while.
- 6) **What if someone in the church tests positive for COVID19 after attending worship?** They should let the church know as soon as possible so that others can be informed of possible infection. Those who came in contact/proximity would be asked to self-quarantine for 2 weeks.
- 7) **When do we go back to "normal"?** The Diocese calls that phase III, when we have a widely available vaccine and/or treatment to protect ourselves. This could be anywhere from 12 to 24 months away.

Your vestry and I are working on putting together our plan for re-opening the church. This plan must then be shared with you all and approved by the Bishop. She has given me the go ahead to work towards that May 30th-31st opening date, as long as we don't see a spike in new cases as restrictions are lifted.

Stay tuned for more information in the coming weeks.

Peace,
Rev. Allison +