

1 February 2021

Dear St. Stephen's,

We are entering February with mixed news about the pandemic. There are vaccines being given now to those 65 years or older and those with certain underlying health conditions. Some of you have been able to get a vaccine and for that I am grateful. However, there continue to be shortages of the vaccines distributed and I know our government is trying to find ways to get more vaccines to the people. We continue to hear about additional pharmaceutical companies making additional vaccines and working to get those released for emergency use. All of that is promising.

On the other hand, we know that the UK and South African variants are now in multiple places in the nation and it is only a matter of time before they are also in our neighborhood. The concern with the UK and South African variants is that they appear to be MORE contagious and might be also more deadly. The researchers are continuing to examine these new mutations of the virus and the initial reports suggest that the existing vaccines will work against these new variants to some extent.

I keep watch on the statistics for our Arizona state and Cochise County rates of infection and numbers of new cases. As it was previously when we went from phase 1 to phase 2 this summer, I am looking for 14 days of continuous decreases in infection rates/new cases. I am attaching a page from the Johns Hopkins University Data Dashboard for Arizona and Cochise County. It shows that although our numbers have declined a bit, our infection rate is still higher than desired... Arizona is at 11.4 positive infection rate and Cochise county is at 8.2.

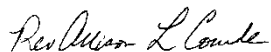
The disease experts are concerned that the next 2 months may be some of the worst we have seen because of the increased contagiousness of the new variants. Because I deeply care for us all and want to try to keep us as safe as possible, I am extending our online worship phase 1 to Mid-March... adding another month to our shut-down to 14 March. If we suddenly have more vaccines available and numbers come down, I will happily reverse this decision.

Nearly all of us now know of someone who has had Covid. Some survived and some have not. Just this past weekend my sister Kim in South Carolina tested positive. She has been practicing the protocols and is not certain exactly how she caught it. So far, she has moderate symptoms: low energy/sleepiness, headache, body aches, chills, sore throat, slight cough. Thank you for your prayers for Kim as she goes through this.

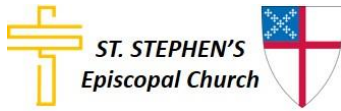
Please continue to be cautious. Get your vaccine as soon as you can! I know we all want this to end sooner rather than later. We are all tired of masks, distancing, and not being able to gather the way we like... trust me, as an extrovert, I feel it as badly as you do. God be with us to protect us and keep our hopes high.

Peace,

The Reverend Allison Cornell



Rector, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church



ST. STEPHEN'S
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