

26 October 2021

Dear Friends of St. Stephen's,

I have recently been asked about our continued use of masks and social distancing in church.

First, let me thank you sincerely for your willingness to abide by the decisions of our church leadership on the Vestry in consultation with our diocese and Bishop Reddall to re-instate our protocols. Believe me, no one enjoys wearing masks as we have all needed to do over the past two years. However, because we have been diligent and taken cautionary measures during this Covid crisis, I am happy to report that only a few of our members have caught Covid, none from church services, and no one in our congregation has died of Covid over these many months. For that I am both thankful for your cooperation and grateful for our success in limiting Covid exposure.

I monitor our infection rates in our community regularly (a few times a week) to keep informed of the trends in our area. The guidance that we have from the Bishop says that when we have a 14 consecutive day stretch of declining infection rates, we can once more relax our Covid restrictions. For the past month our area has been at a plateau, however the last week has shown the beginning of what may be that point of declining infection rates.

When we reverted back to wearing masks at the beginning of August, the infection rate for our area was 5 new cases per day. It rapidly escalated to the plateau of 55 new cases per day with the Delta variant causing our new wave of infections. This past week we dropped down to 45 new cases per day.

If history is an indicator of projected trends, then we can hope that we will see a significant continued downward trend in new cases in the coming weeks. When we see that consecutive downward trend for 14 days, we will once more relax our mask wearing and social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated. Those who are not vaccinated are asked to continue to wear masks in church. Also, any who feel that they have compromised immune systems and feel vulnerable may choose to wear masks.

Please be patient as we watch for declining numbers in our community and hang in there for what we hope will be just a couple more weeks. Your church leaders and I thank you and appreciate your observing our protocols. You have all been great during this very trying time of virus anxiety.

Peace and blessings,
Rev. Allison Cornell
Rector, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Sierra Vista, AZ