

April 12, 2022

Dear Members and Friends of St. Mark's,

According to my records, my latest Pastoral Letter to you is dated May 2020. We were learning how to have church on line and beginning to learn how to live with the COVID virus. It is now two years later and we are still learning. However, life with COVID is getting better. We have vaccines to reduce infections. We have treatments to reduce illness in the event of infection and we have the continuation of masking, social distancing and other mitigation methods to reduce exposure.

Because infection levels in our part of the country and the commonwealth are decreasing, our Bishop, the Right Rev. Ketlen Solak, has sent out a letter to the clergy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, urging us to loosen the restrictions that have been in place. In light of her letter, the Vestry of St. Mark's and I are making the following changes starting this coming Easter Day (April 17, 2022.):

Masking will be optional. Anyone who wishes to continue to wear a mask will be encouraged to do so without criticism or question.

Social distancing will continue to be encouraged. We have the space in the nave to observe safe distances. Family groups may sit together as before.

Coffee hour and other activities in which we eat and drink together will be resumed. With that in mind, I am asking for those coming for Easter to please bring cookies to share. Coffee will be provided.

Hand hygiene continues to be very important so hand sanitizer will continue to be readily available and easy to locate.

I do ask that anyone who is having viral symptoms to please stay at home and worship virtually.

In discussions with bishop colleagues and medical personnel, Bishop Ketlen has written that she believes it is safe to go back to the use of the Common Cup for Communion which is something that many of us have sorely missed. With that in mind, during Communion on Easter Day, I will distribute the bread as I have been from the center of the aisle at the bottom of the stairs. Those coming for communion will form a line to receive the bread. On my right will be a chalice bearer with a common cup for sipping the wine. That chalice bearer will be asked to carefully wipe the rim of the cup, both inside and outside the rim, and rotate the chalice before offering it to the next person. On my left will be a chalice bearer with the intinction cup held low enough that anyone wishing to intinct can see the level of the wine. I ask that you dip the wafer carefully so that your fingers do not touch the wine. If you prefer to skip the wine, please feel free to do so. Having just the bread is a valid Eucharist. Any leftover wine from both chalices will be poured on the ground or down the piscina in the sacristy.

We will continue to monitor infection levels and hospitalizations in our area. If the numbers start going up due to variants, etc. previous mitigation protocols will be reinstated. We will communicate this via mail, email, our web site, our Facebook page and announcements on Sundays.

As part of our Easter celebration, the choir will be returning. Please welcome the singers, readers and chalice bearers by participating in the liturgy enthusiastically. It will once again be a joy filled day.

For those of you continuing to worship with us on-line, please be patient. We will be experimenting with various positions of the cameras, etc. to be sure that you get the best views for meaningful participation in our worship.

Easter blessings to all of you.

Peace, Mother Nancy