



The Diocese of Bethlehem
Return to Indoor Gathering, March 18, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Morning Prayer ends always in hope for the new day:

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in
believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Romans 15:13

We are called to be a people of hope for the world, and we have reason to feel hopeful this Lenten season. Easter is on the horizon. The warmth of spring has green shoots sprouting from brown earth. Improving circumstances indicate that we can now consider gathering indoors again.

In continuing dialog with health officials, neighboring dioceses, ecumenical partners, and most importantly, you, the people of the Church, we believe it is now time to consider reopening our doors to indoor gatherings.

As we realize this fond hope, we must do so with care. Throughout the crisis, we have been guided by the best scientific and medical information available. Currently, positive trends in infection rates, declining community spread, and increased vaccinations indicate that a careful, limited reopening is now possible.

What is the process we need to follow to reopen?

To consider indoor gathering and worship, each parish must determine the following:

- Your county's 7-day Average New Cases per 100,000 to be less than 25 for 2 consecutive weeks
- The Vestry's consensus to open for indoor gathering/worship
- The agreement of the Rector/Priest-in-charge to open for indoor gathering/worship

Parish leadership should prayerfully consider these three elements and notify the Bishop in writing (email or letter) of any decision to gather indoors.

What if there is a COVID-19 infection as a result of indoor gathering at our church?

Please contact the Bishop as quickly as possible via phone or email.

What if the infection level goes higher than the goal after we have reopened?

Parishes should track the 7-day Average New Cases per 100,000 for their county. If the 7-day Average New Cases per 100,000 increases to 25 or more for 2 consecutive weeks, indoor gathering should be suspended until the 7-day Average New Cases per 100,000 returns to less than 25 for 2 consecutive weeks.



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The diocese has created a dedicated webpage to assist parishes in making decisions going forward. This webpage will provide current:

- Information on criteria for reopening.
- 7-day Average New Cases for each county in the diocese.
- Protocols for gathering safely indoors in-person and for worship.
- Resources to assist in planning for a return to indoor gathering and worship.

[Click here for the diocesan website's COVID-19 page.](#)

Because the selected criteria vary from region to region across our diocese, we rely on the prudence, care, and wisdom of local church leaders to make these decisions in a spirit of prayer with mutual respect and love for all concerned. Diocesan staff are available to assist any parish in making these critical decisions. Do not hesitate to contact Steve Baker, Canon to the Ordinary for Mission Resources and CFO at steve@diobeth.org (610-691-5655, ext. 258) or any staff member to assist.

Sincerely,

Standing Committee

Raymond Arcario-Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem	The Rev. Jane Bender-St. Margaret's, Emmaus
Lynne Graham-St. Paul's, Montrose	Liza Holzinger-St. Andrew's, Allentown
Carol C. McMullen-St. Luke's, Scranton	The Rev. Doug Moyer-President
The Rev. Earl Trygar-Grace Church, Kingston	The Rev. Van Bankston-Good Shepherd, Milford

Diocesan Council

The Rev. Timothy Alleman-St. Stephen's Pro-Cathedral & Holy Cross, Wilkes-Barre	Melissa Amator-Trinity, Easton
The Rev. Melinda Artman-Redeemer, Sayre	Jim Harding-St. Anne's, Trexlertown
Matthew Malani-St. Stephen's Pro-Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre	Ross Mangina-Trinity, Bethlehem
The Rev. Michelle Moyer-Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem	Rebecca McLaughlin-St. Mark's, Moscow
Sara McNelis-Grace Church, Kingston	The Rev. Dr. Margaret Pendergast-Christ Church, Reading
The Rev. Dr. Jane Williams-St. Andrew's, Allentown	The Rev. Dr. David A. Zwifka-St. Luke's, Lebanon

Bishop

The Rt. Rev. Kevin D. Nichols