

Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church
Waretown, NJ 08087

Re-Opening With Care Plan Amid COVID-19 Pandemic
Modification of June, 2021

Overview. The Original Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church ("SSEC") Reopening Plan and protocols were launched in July of 2020. The SSEC Plan was based on directives of the Diocese of NJ as promulgated in the June 4, 2020 Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for Reentering, Reopening, and Reimagining ("RRR Task Force") Report. The SSEC Plan and was approved by the Bishop prior to resuming in-person worship services.

On May 13, 2021 the RRR Task Force updated the Report. In an email, Bishop Stokes said "*As vaccination rates and availability rise, and public health guidance and federal, state, and local mandates are reduced, we as the gathered Body of Christ are able to eliminate many of the limits on gathering that we have diligently followed for many months.*" Later in that email he went on to say "*This new report from the Reentering, Reopening, and Reimagining (RRR) Task Force is meant to help congregations, their leaders, and members care for one another and consider how we gather joyfully and appropriately in this transitional time of a global pandemic.*"

Therefore the Vestry has approved the following Immediate changes to our COVID-19 Protocols. These protocols apply to all worship services and gatherings at Saint Stephen's and are published so that individuals may make an informed choice about whether it is safe and appropriate for them to attend or participate at an in-person event at SSEC.

1. **Masks/Face Coverings.** This policy applies to all grounds and ministries at St. Stephen's.
 - A. Any individual who is not fully vaccinated (two weeks or more after the final recommended dose in their vaccine series) must wear a mask at any gathering of the congregation or on church property, whether indoors or outside.
 - B. Those who are fully vaccinated are not required to wear masks, indoors or out.
 - ***Any individual may choose to wear a mask at any time, and should not be questioned about their reasons for doing so.*** Individuals may choose to continue to mask at church gatherings out of care for others who are not vaccinated.
 - All entry doors will contain a notice on indoor mask wearing policy.
 - C. **Verification of Vaccination Status.** The vaccination status of anyone entering the church, church property, or worshipping with the congregation shall not be verified. However, the vaccination status of individuals participating in the following ministries must be verified and recorded.
 - **Choir Members**, because their ministry requires them to project their breath further and more forcefully than most worshippers.
 - **Lectors, Readers and Liturgical Leaders.**
 - **Sunday School Teachers.**
 - **Christian Education Leaders.**
 - **Food Pantry Volunteers.**

D. **Preregistration & Seating.** Pre-registration is suspended. Those attending worship are free to choose their own seating. Likewise, contract tracing is no longer required.

E. **Communion.** Communion shall continue to be offered in one kind only. The common cup is not yet authorized for use in the Diocese of New Jersey.

F. **Other Restrictions which currently remain in place.**

- Communion shall continue to be offered in one kind only. The common cup is not yet authorized for use in the Diocese of New Jersey.
- Progression to the altar rail to receive Communion will commence in the same order as has been the custom during the pandemic. However, the Usher will no longer announce names.
- The congregation is still not permitted to sign.
- The Peace shall continue to be non-touch. Please do not leave your seating positions to extend peace.
- Offerings should be placed in the arms plates at the entrance to the church.
- We are not yet ready to return the Book of Common Prayer to the pews.

Things you can look forward to in the near future.

1. Return to two services (at such time when we can supply clergy for both).
2. Return to the use of the Book of Common Prayer.
3. Restore the coffee hour.
4. Return to Service Bulletins.
5. Return prayer requests and other informational materials to the pews.

The church will still need to have a three-day gap between services.

At the earliest, we do not expect to return to a choral service until early winter.