

Memorandum from Chancery, Diocese of Gallup

Date: January 20, 2021

Subject: Update for Ministry Policies under Pandemic

Dear Clergy and Faithful Members of the Diocese of Gallup,

Greetings in this new year full of hope for a better year than last. The roll-out of the vaccines is causing a lot of new questions. There has not been a much to announce because nothing that effects guidance to our churches and the faithful regarding our faith activities has changed so far. The following notes address the status of the issues and policies:

Basic facts regarding vaccines (as best known):

- Vaccination is not 100% effective in establishing an immune response. It is 94% for the COVID vaccines, which is good, but no one knows which 6 out of every 100 will still be susceptible to the disease.
- In some individuals the vaccination may cause an immune response but infection can still occur at a reduced severity. Such persons may still be infectious to others. (This percentage is uncertain.)
- Immunization is not fully effective until 1-2 weeks after the second vaccination. How soon it provides partial protection is highly variable between people.
- Some have questioned the ethical practices of the production of the vaccines. A full discussion may be found on the Homepage at DioceseofGallup.org.

Current disease parameters:

- The COVID-19 disease prevalence is still at least twice the highest peak of the surge in July 2020 in both New Mexico and Arizona.
- In Arizona, the illness rate appears to be subsiding, but hospitals are filled to 93% capacity, a close margin.
- In New Mexico, the disease has declined from its peak but is only slowly decreasing. Hospital occupancy is decreasing, fortunately.
- The disease in the Native lands is reported at rates near those of adjacent counties.

Current health regulatory responses and procedures:

- No change in advice to maintain safe physical distancing.
- No change in advice to wear facial coverings or masks.
- No change in advice to avoid crowds.
- No special privileges for vaccinated persons (no green hat, badge, carrying card or certificate)

- New Mexico
 - No changes from the guidance posted in the “Red to Green” policy
 - No change in quarantine for travelers from out of State (still 14 days, although the CDC has advised that 10days should be sufficient). The status of a one-time COVID test does not change this mandate.
- Both Arizona and New Mexico
 - Vaccinations will be distributed based on defined tiers of risks and the availability of the vaccines.
 - Registration for the vaccine is available on each state website. Completing the registration establishes the risk tier and serves as an authorization for the vaccination sites to give the vaccine when the corresponding tier or phase is released.

Notable changes:

The policy of New Mexico gives Catron County some relaxation of restrictions because their disease status reached a “yellow” level. As far as church activity is concerned, the only change is that religious gatherings in that county may increase to 33% of the allowable numbers for the fire code occupation of the meeting space. All other restrictions remain in place.

Guidance from Chancery:

- Prior guidance regarding the conduct of Mass, Holy Communion, home visitation, and gathering remain unchanged except for the first item in this list of reminders:
 - Home and hospital visits by priests to those who are ill are encouraged to administer the sacrament of the anointing, especially to those who are in danger of death. Please carefully follow the prior published information for safe conduct of these visits.
 - Only clergy distribute Holy Communion in the manner prescribed. Exception is granted for faithful lay persons approved by the pastor to take Holy Communion to persons isolated in their own place of residence.
 - Physical distancing is to be observed in all “gatherings” and number limits are prescribed in New Mexico by health policy regulations.
 - Face coverings/masks are strongly advised for all, and in New Mexico, it is the law.
 - Activities that encourage close contact of persons from different households should be avoided. (Examples: different families gathering for meals or clergy visiting family homes.)
- New Mexicans are reminded about the quarantine policy after leaving and returning to the State.
- Vaccination does not change any of the policy requirements.

- For those desiring vaccination, view the health department website for your state and register for the vaccine. Help others to register if no computer access. On the native reservation areas or pueblos contact the local Indian Health Service facilities for possible opportunities. You may be categorized as “spiritual leaders” and offered vaccination sooner than other parameters would indicate. Stay in contact with local providers, particularly one’s own primary provider, for vaccination opportunities that may open unexpectedly.
- Changes in church policies and guidance will come when the disease prevalence decreases and the health authorities advise that more interaction between people is safe.

Bottom line:

It is not time to let down our guard. The vaccine is not magic, and we are a long way from getting enough people immunized to effectively halt the spread of the disease. The use of interpersonal distancing and other good practices to prevent disease transmission remain our best defense currently. Some restrictions on public interaction will likely persist for another 6-9 months, presuming optimum effectiveness of the vaccine, public cooperation, and no major change in the parameters of the disease.

Thank you for your ministry during this trying time. Please contact me if there are questions about implementing any of the policies or if copies of previously published policies are required.

Respectfully in Christ,



Dcn Randolph Copeland, MD
Chancellor

References for vaccination registration:

New Mexico: <https://cvvaccine.nmhealth.org/> or call 1-855-600-3453, press option 0
Arizona: <https://podvaccine.azdhs.gov/> or call 602-542-1000