



The Diocese of Bethlehem  
Gathering Protocols Update, May 20, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

In anticipation of the full promise of Easter, we read:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place . . .  
. . . all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1,4

For over a year, we in the Diocese of Bethlehem have journeyed together through difficult times that brought death and despair to so many friends and loved ones. Initially, we hoped for a quick resolution to the pandemic, only to be repeatedly disappointed and frustrated. Fears of all kinds mounted as months passed. Now we see that, perhaps, this was our time of waiting – anxious, and fearful – as those first disciples. But soon we celebrate Pentecost, the day the disciples were “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and experienced a new beginning in power they could not imagine before.

As predicted by health experts, new COVID-19 cases have begun to trend down as vaccination rates trend up across the diocese. Additionally, the increasing body of scientific knowledge about COVID-19 enables us to suggest simpler guidelines and recommendations for gathering, as well as relaxed protocols for fully vaccinated people.

The Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem acknowledges the diverse circumstances that exist within its borders. As the program of vaccination against COVID-19 progresses, local conditions will vary. Consequently, diocesan leadership has every confidence that vestries and clergy throughout the diocese will make reasonable and responsible decisions concerning the resumption of worship and other parish activities according to local circumstances. To facilitate that process, the diocese stands ready to offer any specific guidance or resources that may be needed. These resources will continue to be found on the diocesan web site at <https://diobeth.org/covid19>.

While the guidelines for a parish to gather indoors remain the same, we suggest that after opening, a parish need not close again unless there is an unanticipated and significant increase in new COVID-19 cases. Only in the unforeseen case of significant increase in new cases will the Bishop and diocesan leadership bodies suggest that parishes consider halting indoor gathering.

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

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- Information on criteria for gathering indoors.
- 7-day Average New Cases for each county in the diocese.
- Vaccination rates for each county in the diocese.
- Guidelines and recommendations for gathering safely indoors.

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

Diocesan staff are available to assist any parish in making decisions regarding gathering during this pandemic. Do not hesitate to contact Steve Baker, Canon to the Ordinary for Mission Resources and CFO at [steve@diobeth.org](mailto:steve@diobeth.org) (610-691-5655, ext. 258) or any staff member to assist.

Sincerely,

Carol C. McMullen-Standing Committee  
St. Luke's, Scranton

The Rev. Doug Moyer-Standing Committee  
President

Sara McNelis-Diocesan Council  
Grace Church, Kingston

The Rev. Dr. Jane Williams-Diocesan Council  
St. Andrew's, Allentown

The Rev. Dr. David A. Zwifka-Diocesan Council  
St. Luke's, Lebanon

The Rt. Rev. Kevin D. Nichols-Bishop