

Covid-19 Update for all Congregations and Leaders

Dear Congregational Leaders and Members,

In these hard times, I bring you this good news from St. Paul:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation [even COVID19], will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

I must confess my frustration, sorrow, and struggle, as we face this ongoing crisis of the coronavirus. This Delta variant has unexpectedly struck at our hope and confidence that this pandemic would be behind us by now. But our certain hope and our sure confidence must always return to one way, one truth, one life: Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, Son of the living God. I am convinced, I believe – and I ask God to help me when my trust wavers (see Mark 9:24).

So in the sure faith that the love of God is and will get us through, let me declare this guidance, grounded in the best science and information we have in this moment:

- Monitor and follow directions and guidance given by national, state, and local authorities.
- Maintain social distance, frequent hand-washing, and other effective protocols.
- **Wear masks**, especially indoors and around those exposed to children until 12.
- **Get vaccinated** and encourage all those eligible for vaccines to do so.

Here in the Bishop's Office, even though our entire staff is currently vaccinated, we are returning to wearing masks while indoors. I fully support and endorse any congregation, council, or leader who decides to do the same – along with any other precautions they deem necessary. I also invite you to keep your mission district deans informed of your decisions, so they can keep me and the synod staff aware, as we support and pray for each other.

We are in a marathon, not a sprint. So we must cling to Christ, the Word of God, and strive as one to be of one mind and one heart, in these sacred words:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1)

In God's love,
Bishop Christopher deForest
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