



Coronavirus Update: 27 April 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at St. John's,

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Immunity grows. Infections, hospitalizations, and deaths due to Coronavirus decline. Praise God!

Just as St. John's followed the regulations into "lock-down mode," so does the Coronavirus Task Force plan to follow the relaxation and expiration of those orders out of lock-down.

For several weeks already, distancing regulations have been all but eliminated (and have no meaningful limit for our context at St. John's). The mask order in our county expired on 16 April. In light of these changes, the St. John's Coronavirus Task Force is taking deliberate and measured steps gradually to restore some semblance of normality. As you know, the common cup was offered as an option on Sunday, 18 April, and will continue to be. The 11:00 a.m. Divine Service has also been set aside for reduced social distancing with no cap on attendance. But there's more to come.

BACK TO NORMAL[-ISH] ON 30 MAY

Given the elimination of regulations in our county, the Coronavirus Task Force has set 30 May as the date when a number of things will change significantly at St. John's—provided that there's no dangerous spike in infections, hospitalizations or deaths and no new orders are issued by the county.

On 30 May, fourteen-and-a-half months after we made our first adjustments to limit attendance, St. John's will:

- restore the normal Sunday schedule of 2 Divine Services—one at 8:00 and one at 11:00—with Sunday School and Bible classes starting at 9:45. Note that the early Divine Service is no longer at 8:15, but 8:00. This allows a nice bit of time for socializing prior to the start of Sunday School. Coffee will be available in the Courtyard at 9:15.
- continue to offer both the chalice and individual glasses on Sundays and festivals. We plan ultimately to restore the pre-C-19 usage of reserving 3 Divine Services per month for individual glasses alone, with 5 (or 7) for chalice only, but that will come later.
- begin kneeling again to receive the Sacrament at all Sunday and festival Divine Services in the nave.
- have masking optional for all Sunday and festival Divine Services and other activities at church. If you want to wear your mask, please do. If not, have regard for your neighbor. Smaller groups and boards meeting in enclosed spaces or close proximity will be left to determine by majority vote whether they'd like everyone to mask for their meetings or not.
- no longer require social distancing.
- drop the use of SignUpGenius for Sunday and festival Divine Services.

MONDAY NOON SERVICE REMAINS IN PLACE

The Divine Service on Monday will keep all the present conventions in place: distancing, masking, individual-glass communion, registration for attendance on SignUpGenius. We're interested in seeing how attendance at this Divine Service shakes out. Please bear in mind that the Monday Divine Service isn't offered primarily as a convenience, but for those who feel they're in danger of significant complications from contracting Coronavirus. Note, too, that with Vacation Bible School, Rhythm of Faith Music Camp, and other summer events coming up the Monday schedule may be interrupted from time to time.

MONTHLY BREAKFASTS RETURNING

With the time between Sunday Divine Services loosened up, we'll also reinstitute our practice of having monthly breakfasts on the second Sunday of the month. Sunday 13 June will be our first since February 2020. Keep your eyes peeled and your ears tuned for more on that. We know that many of you are looking forward to joining your brothers and sisters in Christ in this informal way again.

WHY SHOW THE CARDS SO EARLY?

We don't want anyone to be taken by surprise by the changes coming on 30 May, so we're letting you know what's coming with plenty of time. The risk of letting the cat out of the bag now, of course, is that some may jump the gun. We'd simply ask: even though you know the changes are coming you please don't get ahead of the congregation—this for the sake of good order and to allow everyone the time to adjust. Many of you are itching to ditch the masks; but just as many will be uncomfortable come 30 May. So let's work together on this. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).

A FINAL WORD

For all the difficulties of the past thirteen-and-a-half months the Lord has certainly blessed our congregation. Numerous people stepped forth to help out in ways they never had before (altar guild, ushers, communion assistants, sanitizing crews, board and officer replacements, recordings). The good Lord blessed the precautions we all took by not allowing our congregation to become a vector for the spread of the virus. Some of your brothers and sisters in Christ did get the virus—and some with serious illness—but there was no spread here at St. John's, thank God! Members of the congregation made concerted efforts to reach out to members they hadn't seen or knew couldn't attend. A new class of catechumens—both youth and adults—was prepared for confirmation. The faithful continued to support the work of the congregation, sometimes even when they themselves were unable to attend church for months at a time.

Above all, the central thing for which the congregation exists continued without interruption—the public administration of the Sacraments and the public preaching of God's Word among the faithful, with strong participation. There's no salvation apart from Jesus, and there's no Jesus for you apart from His Word and Sacraments. That's how He comes to you, calls you to the faith, and keeps you in it. That the Lord should have sustained this ministry of Word and Sacrament in our midst in such a fraught time is truly amazing, especially when you consider that in so many other situations in the past thirteen months either it was illegal (think California, Michigan, or New York) or congregations (pastors and people alike) just gave up on it. Lord, have mercy.

May we receive all these benefits of His to us with thanksgiving. And may the good Lord continue to bless and keep us! Amen.