



Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia

The Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop

1608 Virginia Street, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25311
Mailing Address:
PO Box 5400
Charleston, West Virginia 25361

The Feast of the Venerable Bede

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write this to you with some fear and trepidation. Today is the Feast of Bede, who is a devoted scholar. Today I write to you regarding things of which I am only a student: the Coronavirus and re-entry of our parishes.

But, I also write to you as the Bishop of West Virginia, having served here for nearly 20 years. I know the good people of West Virginia, and I know that while we don't always agree on every jot and tittle, we do agree on the holiness of life and our common call for the protection of all.

Ever since the CDC changed its statement on masks, social distancing and the vaccine, I have been receiving emails from around the Diocese asking what the new guidelines are, based on the most recent CDC guidelines. I have been told that most other dioceses around us have opened their doors and are back to pre-pandemic activities. I have been told that chalices are being prepared and used for the distribution of the sacrament in both kinds. I have been told that we are lagging behind all the rest of the dioceses.

I truly appreciate these hopeful aspirations. One of the gifts that has been given to me is the opportunity to talk with clergy and bishops from around The Church. This afternoon I was on a Zoom call with 5 other bishops. Earlier this week, I have been in contact with at least 4 other bishops. We all talk a lot about COVID and our response.

Every diocese is wrestling with this, and every diocese is deciding. The common thread is that we are all moving slowly. We want to make sure that our parishes are safe places for all to gather.

Some dioceses that have been only worshiping via internet for the past year are now coming back to 'in-person' worship and

Phone: 304-344-3597
Toll-free: 866-549-8346
Fax: 304-343-3295
www.wvdiocese.org

activities. However, they are still putting some parameters on what 'life together' looks like.

One diocese only permits parishioners to meet indoors for 30 minutes, while fully masked, regardless of vaccinations. Another diocese differentiates between indoor and outdoor activities. Some dioceses are still contemplating the congregational singing of hymns. Scientific evidence about the threat of singing is still lacking. The variations are endless!

In West Virginia, we recognize that the rate of infection has dropped dramatically, and that the number of cases reported in our State is also down significantly. However, as People of God, we are called to care for "the least of these," which includes those who have not been vaccinated, as well as those who are too young or who are vulnerable.

We recognize that there is a mixed vaccine status throughout our parishes. We know that there are some adults who have not been vaccinated, for a variety of reasons. We will not stigmatize them. And those who have been vaccinated, and still wear masks will not be stigmatized either.

There has been some discussion about roping off sections of the Nave for those who have not been vaccinated, or setting sections aside for various people, so as to keep distancing. We cannot tolerate this, as it brings back painful memories of those who have privilege and those who don't. We will not relive those atrocities.

I am reminded of two stories. The first is the 'Rag Tag Army,' by Martin Bell, in "The Way of the Wolf." In this story, God is marching on, leading the troops. However, with each step, someone either gets lost, or gets out of line, or looks to smell the flowers. Each time, God stops the march, and goes back to pick up the straggler. This repeats itself over and over again. At the end, the writer finally asks if the march will ever truly take place.

The second story is a broader one, which I cannot fully remember, except that the travelers will not travel any faster or further than the slowest and the weakest. They travel

together, and along the way, they support one another.
Efficient? Certainly not! Christian? Absolutely!

These two stories remind me that, as a Christian Community, we will walk this path together. I realize it is frustrating for some, but it is for the support of all that we do this together.

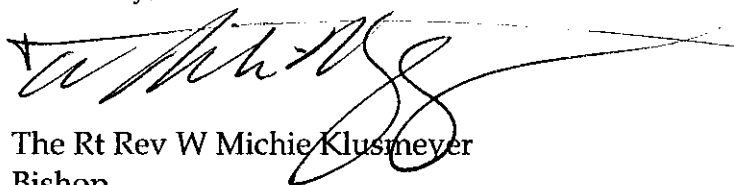
Life is fragile, and the Coronavirus has taught us that we are all extremely vulnerable.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I do not need you." (I Corinthians 12:21). We are inextricably connected.

Therefore, I ask us to walk together for a short season. Unlike last year, when we thought we knew what we didn't know, this time, we realize that there is much that we do not know, but we will walk together.

God bless you.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Michie Klusmeyer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Rt Rev W Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop

GATHERING GUIDELINES FOR
IN-PERSON GATHERINGS
THE DIOCESE OF WEST VIRGINIA
26 MAY 2021

1. Parishes and Vestries no longer need to seek permission from my office to re-open. Based on the guidelines and protocols below, I trust the clergy and people to make wise, informed and healthy decisions for all.
2. The distribution of Holy Eucharist is to remain in 'One Kind.' The use of the Common Cup is still not permitted. Common bread loaves are also to be avoided. The use of the 'host' is expected.
3. Outdoor services, coffee hours and meetings are always safer than indoors.

OUTDOOR GATHERINGS

1. The limits or restrictions on the number of people permitted to gather outdoors is lifted.
2. Social distancing is still expected.
3. Masks are expected for those who are either too young to be vaccinated, or for those who have not been vaccinated.
4. Singing is permitted, distanced from one another.
5. Coffee hours are permitted, however the food should be served by a designated host, rather than put out in buffet style.
6. Prayer Books and Hymnals may be used.

INDOOR GATHERINGS

1. Masks are still expected, given that there will be unvaccinated persons, and others who are too young to be vaccinated, or unable.
2. The numbers of people permitted has been changed. The maximum number of people permitted is the number that can comfortably sit in the space, while remaining socially distant. (6' apart, and every other pew)

3. Singing by the congregation is permitted, while masked!
 - a. Readers who are fully vaccinated and separated from the body of the nave may remove their mask while reading.
 - b. Preachers, who are fully vaccinated and are distanced from the parishioners may remove their mask
 - c. Persons leading the intercessions who are fully vaccinated, and distanced from parishioners, may remove their mask while leading prayers
4. Choirs may return. However, all must wear masks, and be socially distant. I believe it is appropriate to require all choristers to be fully vaccinated.
5. Eucharist is to be administered in one kind only.
6. Still, no physical passing of the Peace.
7. Coffee hour may return, but with masks, and the food must be served by a host. No buffet style receptions of Coffee Hour.