



Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia

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Dear People of God:

One of my favorite presentations is entitled "Today's Friday! Sunday's Coming!" It is done by Tony Campolo, who is an exciting speaker.

In his show, he talks about what Good Friday has to offer, with pain, sorrow and loss of hope. But then he chimes in by saying, "But Sunday's Coming!" In that, he reminds us of God's victory over all things. Friday is dismal, but Sunday is filled with joy. It's the hopefulness and expectation that keeps Christians moving forward.

I think that for many, these past two years have felt like Fridays.

Two Lents ago, we came to a screeching halt and canceled in person Church. We discovered a new thing called Zoom, and embraced it, because there really wasn't another alternative. It allowed us to at least converse with each other, and to see others' faces, but it wasn't 'the real thing.' It was lacking the physicality of The Body of Christ.

Along the way, we have experienced loss and strange events: January 6, COVID, racial tensions, violence and murders, and now a senseless war in Ukraine.

But Sunday's Coming!

Several months ago, it looked like we had turned the corner on COVID. Cases in West Virginia had declined significantly, and it looked like all would be well. And then, a new strain arrived, and the number of cases climbed more than 20 times! The active cases in West Virginia went from under 1,000 to over 20,000 in a matter of a couple of weeks.

Along the way, I have heard from people around the State of West Virginia. Some were wanting me to lift the mask mandates, and others were pleading not to go too far too quickly.

As of the most recent reporting, it appears that there are 795 current active reported cases in West Virginia.

The CDC has lifted mask mandates for most counties and people.

I have said for the past 2 years that we would follow the science and the experts...not the politicians.

With that in mind, I am lifting the MASK MANDATE in our 'in person' Church services in the Diocese of West Virginia, beginning today, Monday, 21 March 2022.

While this means that people will no longer be required (!) to wear masks in Church, it also permits clergy and Vestries to continue to require them in individual parishes and missions. It will be based on local needs and concerns.

If you feel more comfortable wearing a mask, then please continue to do so for as long as you want this layer of protection.

I've also been asked about the use of the 'common cup' at Eucharists. I am well aware that there are some (not many) dioceses where the chalice is again permitted.

Let's take the first step of lifting the mask requirement first. Let's take a small step and see where this leads us.

Today's still Friday, but Sunday's Coming!

Again, I have heard from many corners of the Diocese – some begging for the chalice, and others telling me that they may never drink from the chalice again. Which is right? Life is complicated.

We are now mid-Lent, with Easter fast approaching. God willing, we may be able to celebrate fully on Easter. We shall see.

But along the way, we remember that our lives are changed by Friday, but not controlled by it. We are Sunday People! We are Easter People! The resurrection and hope define who we are, and whose we are.

May we never forget the joys that are yet to come.

God bless you.

In Christ,

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