

Returning to in-person worship at St. James'

At the direction of the Bishop and in step with the entire Episcopal Diocese of Central New York, St. James' suspended in-person worship for the second time, beginning Sunday, November 29, 2020.

Now as we watch falling virus numbers and increasing vaccinations, the Diocese has revised guidelines to allow for in-person worship again. St. James' Re-opening Task Force, Staff, and Vestry are in conversation about timing and details of navigating the re-opening challenges that are unique to St. James'.

I am writing today, because I believe St. James' will be best served by a clearly articulated and intentional philosophy of how we will be Christian community in this new environment.

The following are practices that will guide us through what may very well be a surprisingly challenging next few months into a future that we will discover together.

General principles:

1. We commit to creating a culture in which we have one another's backs, and together we look out for those who are the most vulnerable. To that end, we will consistently ask, "how can I support and care for you?" And "what do you need to feel safe?"
2. Flexibility and grace will continue to be key practices in our common life, recognizing that if someone gets sick or there is an exposure, we may have to back up at a moment's notice from what we have been doing.
3. We will honor and respect the reality that each person has unique health circumstances as well as risk tolerance, both of which determine their comfort level and personal practice. No one will be ridiculed or condemned for the choices they make, rather we will support and care for one another.
4. As a community that is characterized by the life and love of Christ, we will be prepared to continue making sacrifices for one another.

Specific details:

1. We will return to in-person worship when key worship leadership have been fully vaccinated if that is their plan.
2. We will continue providing for the burgeoning online worshipping community that has developed over the last year.
3. We will consider the unique demands of each of the 4 weekly services and how best to return to in-person worship while livestreaming. This likely means that our usual array of weekly Eucharists will *not* return to in-person worship all at the same time.

As these next weeks unfold, please bear in mind that St. James' dependence on technology has dramatically increased, with a resulting increase in staff responsibilities. This means that re-opening can only happen as quickly as we have time and resources to manage these new realities. All decisions regarding the safety of this community will be guided by the wisdom and expertise of the Re-opening Task Force, the Vestry, and staff. If you have questions about decisions, timing, or courses of action, PLEASE take them "upstream" to parish leadership who will either have an accurate answer, or, will know where to get one.

Becky+