

Dear friends,

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert . . . for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.” Isaiah 43:18–21

Our journey through the wilderness is difficult but our Lord continues to refresh us and do new things. In person worship on Sunday mornings has resumed, and in the next several weeks we will be using new audio video equipment made possible by your generous gifts. Thank you, and thanks be to God! I write to you today to explain another step forward as we move to Phase III during the month of October. You can find all of the details about Phase III on our or the diocesan website, but I will outline the most salient points for you here:

- **Churches may gather for worship up to 50% of their building’s capacity:** Though we believe we could safely gather at a larger number, in an abundance of care the vestry has decided to allow 40 to gather for worship on Sunday mornings (45 including ministers of worship) starting October 11th. All other restrictions remain in place—wearing masks, Communion in one kind only, sanitizing hands, and maintaining six feet of physical distance with those not in your immediate household. Additionally, I plan to resume our traditional 8:00AM Rite I and 10:00AM Rite II starting October 18th. Both services will be live streamed and both services will require registration as we are doing now.
- **Resumption of coffee hour:** Some of the details are still being worked out, but we are able to gather for coffee hour following the current guidelines for in person gatherings. Parishioners will have to bring their own food or beverages, if they choose to, but we will be able to sit, talk, and enjoy one another’s company in person. Stay tuned for details about how and when we will officially resume coffee hour.
- **Baptisms and other rites:** Baptisms may resume with some modifications with respect to how many may gather at the font and a few other details. I am personally delighted at this development. We have at least three little ones that have been waiting to be welcomed into the Body of Christ. Our next baptismal service will be on All Saints Day, Sunday, November 1!
- **Other:** Other activities are now permissible such as youth gatherings (aged 14 and older) and some options for expanding singing (though not congregational). Choirmaster, Steve Woytowicz and I are currently exploring and discussing them.

Of course, you may wonder about the timing. Aren’t the numbers going up across the country? Aren’t we supposed to be heading into a second wave this fall? It’s true that in some states the numbers have been spiking, but in Philadelphia and surrounding counties the numbers have been fairly consistent, and the test positivity rates low. Having said that, moving to Phase III doesn’t obligate us to gather at higher numbers or engage in any activity that we don’t think wise. We can suspend a function or reduce the numbers that gather on Sunday morning at any time and the vestry and I will not hesitate to do so. Please know that Rector’s

Warden, Mary Harrar, and I monitor those numbers daily. Phase III simply gives us the flexibility to do more as we deem it wise to do so. I am especially pleased to be able to more ably accommodate pastoral needs at funerals, baptisms, and weddings.

I am also writing to ask you to be especially prayerful and discerning about how you choose to worship. As I have always said, if you are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 because of age, pre-existing conditions, or live with someone who is especially vulnerable, you should not feel obligated to join us for in-person worship. We will continue to live-stream services and I urge you to join us online. I have also affirmed that for some the safety guidelines required for us to gather safely feel so alien or contrary to the spirit of worship that it significantly hampers their ability to worship. I understand those concerns and continue to support their decision to worship from home as well.

At the same time, I ask you all to continue prayerfully discerning how you choose to worship bearing in mind that it is very likely we will be worshipping with restrictions well into 2021, perhaps for the entire year. Even if a vaccine becomes available early next year, it will not be widely available to the general public until at least mid-year and it will be months after that before an adequate number of persons have been immunized to eliminate the need for masks and some measure of physical distancing. My point is, we will be required to accept modified forms of worship for some time to come and we must carefully consider how that will change us and the church. Worship isn't simply a holy obligation. It actually shapes our thoughts, renews our hearts, and transforms our lives. We must always be vigilant about how worship is changing us, or isn't.

If you are worshipping from home, bring an attitude of seriousness, holiness, and a spirit of joy to your worship. Don't just prop yourself up on a pillow with a cup of coffee in your hands. The Holy Eucharist makes us present in the heavenly realms, ushers us into the very throne room of God, and we should carry ourselves as such. If you are joining us in person for worship ask for the grace to see beyond the inconveniences and mixed messages of masks and intimacy, gathering and distance, and instead see love suffering every inconvenience and indignity to be with Christ and his Beloved. Of course, we all grieve the necessary restrictions, but they are God-honoring acts of love as we take seriously our duty to love our neighbor as ourself. This is how Christ has loved us.

Of course, this discernment is a matter of conscience between you and God. I offer you these thoughts, not to chide or push you to a particular decision, but to ask you to make sure you are caring wisely for your soul. Know that I support you in that work, pray for you, and am happy to answer any questions and speak to your concerns any time.

Sincerely,
Fr. Winston+