

May 14, 2021

To the people of the Diocese of East Carolina:

Dear friends in Christ,

What wonderful news! Yesterday the [Centers for Disease Control](#) announced their recommendation that fully vaccinated individuals can resume all pre-pandemic activities without wearing a face covering or keeping physical distance from others. They even specified that fully vaccinated individuals can safely “attend a full-capacity worship service” and “sing in an indoor chorus.” For those of us who have been vaccinated, this is welcome news indeed! What did not make it into most public headlines, however, was that this recommendation was subject to “federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.”

Those of us living in North Carolina are still subject to Governor Cooper’s [Executive Order No. 209](#), which means that we are still required to wear face coverings and maintain appropriate physical distancing in most public indoor settings, whether or not we have been vaccinated. Our Governor has made clear that a new Executive Order will be in place and effective by June 1, if not sooner, and that with this next order he hopes to be able to further ease restrictions.

For now, therefore, the congregations of the Diocese of East Carolina will continue to live within our existing [guidelines for public worship](#), as most recently revised on April 29th. Amongst other things, this means that we will continue to expect that face coverings will be worn by all people during indoor public worship and that we will continue to refrain from congregational singing.

At the same time, we will once again take up the process of decision-making that we have followed throughout this pandemic. Clergy, Churchwardens and members of the Executive Council will be consulted for their guidance about next steps. Statements by neighboring Episcopal dioceses will be reviewed. We’ll watch for our Governor’s next Executive Order, and also for relevant statements from the NC Department of Health and Human Services. You can expect to receive updated guidelines for worship in the Diocese of East Carolina before the end of May, guidelines which would most likely take effect on June 1st. This timeline would allow congregational leaders sufficient time to plan for implementation by the first Sunday of June.

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement in eastern North Carolina, we need to make decisions about our common life that are properly respectful of all of our members and which properly support the health and well-being of the communities in which we live and serve. Not all of us are old enough to be vaccinated, not all of us can be safely vaccinated, and not all of us have chosen to be vaccinated. Will our congregations be places that welcome all people, or only some?

This has been a long journey for us, and it is not yet over. As we take the steps that are still ahead, let us remain committed to giving faithful expression to the promises of our baptismal covenant, as children of God, followers of Jesus and people empowered by Holy Spirit.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Rob Skirving

Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina