



The Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem

Message From Bishop Kevin: Suspension of Indoor Gatherings Effective November 22



Beloved of the Diocese of Bethlehem,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In the last message I shared regarding pandemic protocols for churches, I expressed concerns about indoor gatherings in our parishes. Health experts predicted the possibility of an exponential rise in COVID cases in the colder months as people would meet more often indoors, an environment more likely to spread the virus than outdoors.

Sadly, that prediction has come to pass. Though Pennsylvania had consistently reported well under 1000 daily cases of COVID in the summer, in the past 3 days we have seen those numbers jump to over 4000 a day. And health experts expect that COVID cases will continue to rise over the next few months.

After consulting with health experts, diocesan leaders, and other bishops in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it has become clear that, in order to help ensure the health and safety of the people of the diocese, I must call upon you to suspend all indoor gatherings of our parishes effective November 22nd (or immediately, if you are able) until the end of Advent, December 20th.

This is difficult news, but please know that I intend to reevaluate in mid-December. If the situation improves, if health experts agree that cases and hospitalizations have dropped, and indoor gatherings pose a lower risk of spreading COVID, I assure you that we will update the protocols and consider regathering for Christmas. That said, it's very possible that we will need to make plans to hold our Christmas celebrations virtually, or outdoors with masks and physical distancing. Though this would pose significant sacrifices, I would encourage everyone to embrace this moment as an opportunity to discover new ways to worship God in the beauty and holiness of the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Know that as difficult as this decision is, that my first priority is the health and safety of all our parishioners. Know of my confidence in the resilience of the people of this diocese, and my trust in each and every one of you. And, above all, know "that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." –Romans 8:18

Be assured of my continued prayer and know of my love. Dear people of God,

+Kevin

Bishop of Bethlehem