

## Message From Bishop Kevin: Continued Suspension of Indoor Gatherings



Dearly Beloved,

In of all places – Bethlehem, the Christmas City – for me to come before you again and ask you to restrict your Christmas worship traditions – is truly heartbreaking... But, through the greatness of love (Psalm 5:7) we will endure... and dare I say, keep the light of Christ shining brightly in our communities...

When I suspended all indoor gatherings of our parishes effective November 22nd, I stated my intention to reevaluate in mid-December. I said that if the situation improved and if health experts agreed that cases and hospitalizations had dropped, I assured you that we would update the protocols and consider gathering indoors for Christmas.

Sadly, over the past month we have seen infection rates nearly double in most of our counties. For example, in Berks County the rate was 2,562 cases per 100,000 on November 13 and is over 4,400 as of December 14. The rate in Bradford County, in the Northern region, was 2,012 cases per 100,000 and is over 4,000. Governor Wolf has instituted new restrictions as health experts concur that COVID cases will continue to rise.

In recent days, I consulted once again with local health experts, colleagues from other denominations, and Episcopal bishops in the Commonwealth, and have considered input from congregational COVID Task Forces. I shared this information with the Standing Committee and Diocesan Council and It was their unanimous recommendation that I call upon you to continue to suspend all indoor gatherings of our parishes. Please know that I welcome your feedback and will continue to work with our Diocesan leadership to monitor our protocols moving forward.

Know that as difficult as this decision is, my first priority continues to be the health and safety of all our parishioners, their families, friends, and everyone with whom we come in contact with in our communities.

Let us hold on to the hopeful news of a vaccine being available to each of us in the New Year. And, know of my confidence and trust in each and every one of you.

During this daunting time, we must continually turn to God for guidance:

*All powerful God,  
help us to look forward in hope to the coming of our savior.  
May we live as he has taught,  
ready to welcome him with burning love and faith.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the  
Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen*

Know of my Love

Stay Strong!  
Bishop Kevin