



St. Mark's Episcopal Church

315 East Pecan Street, San Antonio, TX 78205-1819

"Send out your light and your truth that they may lead me, and bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling."
– Psalm 43:3

March 3, 2022

Dear People of St. Mark's,

Blessings during this holy season of Lent. As we enter into a season of preparation for the great feast of Easter Day, I am pleased to be able to give you an update on our COVID-19 protocols. Our workgroup, made up of our senior staff, our wardens, and Dr. David Ross, Dr. Liz Casiano-Evans, and Ms. Ann Leafstedt, have continued to monitor the health markers in our city and updated recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

We are so grateful that after the recent omicron surge, we have returned to the green zone here in San Antonio. Given that we have passed the peak of this variant, the level of vaccination in our community, and new CDC guidelines, **we are now making indoor masking optional in our community**. This is true for public worship as well as our smaller gatherings. We will also return to **using the common cup during communion**. **These changes will take effect as of Sunday, March 6, 2022.**

We are comfortable that this a reasonable step for our community as we increasingly move to a time when we live with this virus in a new way. However, the relaxing of these practices does not mean that the pandemic is over or that there won't be new variants and surges in the future. I encourage you to be vaccinated and to get a booster if you are eligible, as this continues to provide strong protection from the worst impact of COVID-19. And as always, if you are experiencing symptoms, we invite you to join us online until you recover.

For some of you, this news will be long overdue. For others, this may seem too soon. We have learned much over these past two years, and two particularly important insights are that we have different risk tolerances and that none of us knows the fullness of any one person's decision process. Unlike a year ago, vaccines are readily available for most over the age of 5 and the overall ability of each of us to make the decisions that are right for us and our families is something we are navigating in our everyday lives. Our workgroup, the vestry, and our staff have committed to care for one another and to be informed by the best data available. I am so grateful for the ways we have supported each other.

While masking will now be optional and the common cup will be available during communion, you are encouraged to do what is best for you and your family. I expect that many will continue to mask and may continue either to intinct at communion or forgo the wine altogether. In our tradition, receiving either the bread or the wine is considered full communion. As always, if you or someone in your family is ill or exhibiting symptoms of illness, please worship with us from home online. We will continue to live stream our liturgies for all who may not feel comfortable or who may not be able to join us in person. Our services have not been at capacity, so if you desire to social distance during the liturgy, there is ample room to do so. To protect our youngest, nursery staff are vaccinated, boosted, and masked while caring for your little ones.

We will continue our mid-week service at 5:30 pm on Wednesdays, providing another opportunity for worship in a smaller setting. We have trained laypersons and clergy who are willing to bring communion to you in your setting, if that is desired. Whatever your personal practice is, I encourage you to support those making a different choice with kindness as we move to this next phase of our common life.

My hope for this new season is that we can do what we do best as Episcopalians—to walk the *via media*, or middle way. The middle way is intended to be broad and allow us to gather in communion with one another, united in our common prayer. I pray this season of Lent gives us an opportunity to worship with one another in ways that lead us with joy towards Easter morning.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth C Knowlton" followed by a small cross symbol.

The Rev. Elizabeth Knowlton