

July 28, 2021

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you indeed were called in the one body. And be thankful.
-Colossians 3:12-15

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It seems we were almost there. With good reason, we had been thinking and talking more about the future. But now comes a surge in illness caused by the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, and we are faced once again with uncertainty and anxiety made worse by imperfect, incomplete knowledge. Our churches had begun to plan with hope for the fall, for new beginnings, and for an unfettered return to worship, fellowship and ministry. But now...what? What shall we do?

First, pray. Pray for the sick and for those who care for them. Pray for your clergy and Vestry or Bishop's Committee members who are continually called upon to make the best possible decisions in the midst of changing situations and partial knowledge. The local protocols they have developed and implemented, along with the diocesan Guidelines, are useful tools that have served us all well, by God's grace. Pray that your church's leaders will be given wisdom to continue adapting and responding, for the greatest common good. Pray for yourself, that you might hold fast to the truth that "nevertheless, the Kingdom of God has come near."

Second, be vigilant, but keep this latest development in perspective. The vaccines **are** working and greatly reduce risks to those fully vaccinated. While breakthrough cases receive lots of media attention, far fewer than 1/10th of 1% of those fully vaccinated are experiencing symptomatic infection. Since February, 99.5% of COVID-related deaths in Texas have been among unvaccinated people. Pay attention to the CDC and your local health officials. Tuesday, July 27th, the CDC revised its guidance on mask-wearing. In response to the new predominance of the Delta variant, they encourage all people to wear masks indoors and in crowded outdoor places in regions where infections and hospitalizations are high.

Third, if you are eligible and have chosen to remain unvaccinated, please prayerfully reconsider. The Delta variant is highly transmittable, and the unvaccinated are at much higher risk of infection. Additionally, they are much more likely to transmit the virus to other unvaccinated people, including children under the age of 12 for whom there is currently no vaccine. If not for your own sake, I implore you to get vaccinated for the sake of those around you who cannot receive the vaccine and for the well-being of your church and your community. Offer your church as a vaccination site; offer rides to those who want to be vaccinated; do not discourage those who choose to resume wearing masks.

Fourth, continue as you have. The past months of the pandemic have not been wasted on us. We know so much more than we did when we first heard about COVID-19 and I've included a few reminders of what we know at the end of this letter. We **can** lead fairly normal lives individually and in our churches. We **do** know precautions and health/hygiene practices that make us all less vulnerable to the virus. Every church in the Diocese has adopted protocols to fit their local context. I encourage all congregational leaders to review those protocols and adapt as needed.

Fifth, for the time being, the diocesan Phase 2(d) Guidelines remain in effect, as revised on May 18. Until a couple of weeks ago, I had hoped to be announcing the removal of remaining restrictions. I'm sorry, as we all are, that the situation has changed. From the beginning, we have known that the pandemic might change in ways that cause us to pull back again. Thankfully we are not there yet, and the current Guidelines and your own church's protocols should allow your church to adapt as needed to the context of your community.

Finally, "above all these, put on love." As churches and individually, we have put up with so much during this season, from inconvenience to grief. We have put off so many things that matter to us, big and small. We have put away cherished customs and habits. Now it is time for us to rededicate ourselves wholeheartedly to putting on the love of Christ, regarding one another through the eyes of Jesus, and loving one another as he loves us. Because we are his Body, there can be no other way for us than this. It is the only way for us to continue living in and moving through this pandemic together, in the Name of Christ and for the life of the world.

May the love of the Father sustain you; may the light of the Son enfold you; may the power of the Holy Spirit make you bold.

Love in Christ,

+David M. Reed
Bishop of West Texas



A Reminder Of What We Know

- The vaccines work. They are incredibly effective at preventing illness, hospitalization and death, even though they're not a 100% guarantee (nothing works 100% of the time).¹
- The Delta variant of COVID-19 is highly transmittable. 49 states, including Texas, are experiencing steep increases in positive cases.²
- The current surge in Delta cases is 'a pandemic of the unvaccinated.' Nationwide, fewer than 1% of fully vaccinated people have experienced symptomatic COVID infections.³ From February 8 to July 14 in Texas, 99.5% of COVID-related deaths were among unvaccinated people. That percentage is generally true across the country.⁴
- In Texas, as of July 25, approx. 43% of population is fully vaccinated. 50% have received at least one dose.⁴
- Within the Diocese of West Texas as of this letter, about 18 of our 60 counties report vaccination rates of 40-59%. Most of the remaining counties report rates of 30-40%.⁵
- Most health experts think that achieving herd immunity would require 75-90% of the population be fully vaccinated.⁴
- The greatest threat to unvaccinated people, including children, is other unvaccinated people.³

1. *Science Brief: COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 July 2021, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/fully-vaccinated-people.html.
2. *COVID-19 Integrated County View: Maps, charts, and data provided by CDC, updates daily by 8pm ET*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>.
3. Sullivan, Becky. "U.S. COVID Deaths Are Rising Again. Experts Call It A 'Pandemic Of The Unvaccinated.'" National Public Radio, 16 July 2021, www.npr.org/2021/07/16/1017002907/u-s-covid-deaths-are-rising-again-experts-call-it-a-pandemic-of-the-unvaccinated.
4. Guzman, Colleen. "Texas Has Seen Nearly 9,000 COVID-19 Deaths since February. All But 43 Were Unvaccinated People." *Texas Tribune*, 22 July 2021, www.texastribune.org/2021/07/21/coronavirus-texas-vaccinated-deaths.
5. *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Vaccine Data*, Texas Department of State Health Services. <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus>.

