

News Release

Re: Updates Related to In-Person Worship Work Group

March 10, 2021

As we observe the one-year anniversary of major restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of new developments are raising hopes that we can continue the gradual lifting of those restrictions. The Bishop's work group on the Return to In-Person Worship continues to meet regularly to consider revisions to the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM). Below are some updates on the changing environment:

- The number of new COVID cases has been declining steadily in Virginia for 50 days.
- Vaccination efforts continue with 18% of Virginia's population having received at least one dose of the vaccine according to a Virginia Department of Health website on March 9, 2021.
- **Clergy and faith leaders are now considered frontline/essential workers in Virginia and are eligible to be vaccinated during Phase 1b of the commonwealth's vaccine rollout.**
- Everyone can sign up for a free COVID-19 vaccine at the Vaccinate Virginia website.
- On Monday the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued new guidance for those who have been fully vaccinated.

The CDC information will be reviewed by the Return to In-Person Worship Work Group for its implications for the TAM. The guidance document defines a person as fully vaccinated when two full weeks have passed since they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine) or two full weeks following a dose of a single-dose vaccine (like Johnson and Johnson's Janssen vaccine).

**The new CDC guidance is not intended for public gatherings** but offers the promise of further changes as more persons are vaccinated and as case numbers continue to decline. While this new guidance is promising and points towards more loosening of restrictions in weeks to come, at this time the CDC still advises fully vaccinated persons to:

- Take precautions in public like wearing a well-fitted mask and physical distancing
- Wear masks, practice physical distancing, and adhere to other prevention measures when visiting with unvaccinated people who are at [increased risk for severe COVID-19](#) disease or who have an unvaccinated household member who is at increased risk for severe COVID-19 disease
- Wear masks, maintain physical distance, and practice other prevention measures when visiting with unvaccinated people from multiple households
- Avoid medium- and large-sized in-person gatherings

**Though we anticipate more changes to the TAM as we receive more guidance, no further revisions have been made to the TAM beyond those made on February 24, 2021 and churches will still need to follow its requirements.** We celebrate the progress we are making and we ask churches to be alert for more information. Let's stay the course as we move into God's hope-filled future.

P.S. The Work Group has also collected some information and resources to help small churches adapting to the pandemic conditions. You can find that info on the Work Group's webpage at [www.vaumc.org/return](http://www.vaumc.org/return).