

## COVID PHASE II UPDATES

Monday morning, the House of Bishops met for 30 minutes with Dr. Anthony Fauci to discuss COVID in churches. His guidance can be summarized as: wear a mask, stay distanced, be outdoors if at all possible, and be confident that this will end eventually.

In light of the significant progress Arizona has made in controlling COVID-19, the Gathering for Abundant Life Task Force wants to update you about Phase II. Frankly, it's nice to finally feel like I am offering some good news as your bishop.

Congregations which have a Phase II plan approved by the Diocese of Arizona are now permitted to begin OUTDOOR worship of up to 50 people at a time while following their designated Phase II worship practices. A list of congregations with approved Phase II plans is contained below this message.

I am aware that it is hot in most of our diocese right now, too hot to worship outside except perhaps in the very early morning. But for those congregations who are able to do so now, they may begin. And for more of our congregations, as the temperatures cool and we move into the fall and beyond, we encourage you to use your outdoor spaces as much as possible for worship.

Our Diocese as a whole will be using the metrics for the safe opening of schools in Arizona to determine when congregations in each county can enter Phase II.

Those guidelines are available at

<https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/index.php#novel-coronavirus-schools>.

The three metrics considered in those guidelines are:

- A two week decline in cases or less than 100 cases per 100,000 residents for two weeks.
- Two consecutive weeks with percent positivity of testing of less than 7%.
- Two consecutive weeks of hospital visits with COVID-like illness of less than 10% of total visits.

No counties currently meet all three measures, but all counties are on their way.

A word of caution: no congregations are required to enter Phase II just as soon as they are able to do so. Some are choosing to remain online-only through the rest of 2020. That can be a faithful and wise response.

Some members of congregations will not feel safe coming to church while we are in Phase II--and that is also a faithful and wise response. I believe that just about every congregation is planning to continue their online offerings during Phase II. We will be in a hybrid model for some time, but we will also be continuing to learn more about the virus and how to keep ourselves and our churches safe.

This is not a time to let down our guard. Take Dr. Fauci's advice to heart: masks, distancing, outdoors. But also take Jesus' advice: I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly.