



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.— John 13:34

All of us are weary of the pandemic and its continuing effects on our lives. We are frustrated and disappointed to be experiencing increasing COVID test positivity rates and hospitalizations again.

We remain committed to providing core functions as we take steps to prevent the transmission of illness during activities at St. Stephen's Church. We ask for and appreciate your continuing patience, and for your understanding that these measures are taken, not out of fear, but prudently and with concern for the well-being of all who come to St. Stephen's for any reason, and for the well-being of our community. High rates of COVID hospitalizations do not simply affect those patients, but others whose unrelated illnesses or injuries cannot be treated because of a lack of resources.

We know that one source of frustration—we share it—is the need for continual reevaluation and recalibration as public health data change and inform decisions. Yet it is important to be flexible and responsive to what we learn.

This is one reason we hope you will stay informed through the **eSpirit** (our weekly email newsletter), the **Spirit** (our printed Sunday newsletter), our Web site (ststephensRVA.org) and our Facebook page ([ststephensRVA](https://www.facebook.com/ststephensRVA)).

We will continue the following:

In-person worship will continue on Sundays, according to our regular schedule.

We will continue to livestream the Sunday Forum (10:10 a.m.) and services at 11:15 a.m., 5:30 p.m., and 8 p.m.

Weekday Morning Prayer will continue, with all participants fully masked, including worship leaders.

Masks will continue to be required for all taking part in worship indoors. This is regardless of vaccination status. While some congregations are requiring proof of vaccination in order to enter the church, we are not doing so. Since there are people in our midst who are unvaccinated for various reasons, it is important that all of us be masked at all times. We recommend N95 or KN95 masks; these masks are not only effective, but they do not slip down the nose as many other types of masks do.

For the next two weeks, through January 23, we will take the following measures:
During Sunday worship services, singing will be done by a small choir (all of whom are vaccinated) on behalf of the congregation. There will be no congregational singing.

Entrance doors will remain open to promote air flow.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the nursery, and youth formation will not be offered January 9, 16, or 23. The family ministries team continues to explore ways to provide formation and fellowship to our children and youth during this time.

The parish house, including the office, is closed to the public through January 23.

Staff will work according to their normal schedules and respond to emails and voice mails; some will be on site while others will work from home.

The phone will be answered during regular office hours, though at times it will be answered remotely.

The clergy will continue to provide pastoral care, and a priest will be on call for pastoral emergencies, as always.

There will be no gatherings in the parish house, with the following exceptions:

- 12-Step groups may continue to meet. The continuation of these groups is critical for the well-being of their participants.
- Food ministry volunteers may be indoors, fully masked, to sort, bag, and distribute groceries for our weekly food pantry and fruit ministry. Our food ministries are essential to those experiencing insecurity.
- The discernment committee may conduct listening sessions with small groups of parishioners who are safely distanced and masked. The work of this committee is time-sensitive and we want to do what we can to allow it to continue uninterrupted.

We hope that Emmaus groups, Bible study groups, prayer groups and other small groups will be able to meet outdoors, weather permitting, or via Zoom or other virtual platform. (The Thursday Bible Study group will reconvene in February.)

May Fair House, Café, and Farmers Market

The new post-holiday opening date for May Fair House is Tuesday, January 25.

Beginning Tuesday, January 11, the café will be open for outdoor dining and take-out orders; no indoor dining will be permitted at this time.

The farmers market takes place outdoors, so will continue as usual on Saturdays, 9 a.m.-noon.

It's our hope and prayer that this increase will subside quickly as it has done in other places. For now, please attend worship in person if you are comfortable doing so, or watch the livestream if you feel safer at home. And please do what you can to stay healthy and keep others healthy by getting vaccinated, boosted, and being diligent about masks and distancing.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.—Galatians 6:2