January 5, 2022

Dear St. James Family and Friends,

It seems fitting that, in this season when we are asked to “go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, and the Babe lying in a manger,” the rapidly changing circumstances regarding the pandemic are also forcing us to take a breath and reassess our parish’s safety protocols. We are fortunate indeed to appear to have made it through the entirety of our Advent and Christmas celebrations without incident. However, as you probably know well from media reports, the emergence of the Omicron variant is turning out to be a game-changer for Vermont, and not in a good way.

St. James’ in-house COVID response team, consisting of myself, Sari White, Sally Garmon, Barbara Johnson, Fiona McElwain, Jim Lorenz, and Candace Vandouris, met on January 4 to discuss the rapidly changing situation. We are deeply concerned about the impact the sharp increase of cases is having on the wider community, particularly those whose medical status or age make them more vulnerable to the virus, and on the healthcare workers who are struggling to treat the sick.

Because of these concerns, and our Christian call to care for our neighbors, St. James will be suspending all in-person worship, and returning to exclusively online services, beginning this Sunday, January 9. We will continue in that format at least until the end of January, when the team will reassess the situation. As was our practice earlier in the pandemic, there will be one service of Morning Prayer on Zoom at 10:00 am. The service will be followed by a virtual coffee hour, and will continue to use the same link.

Office hours will continue to be held in-person on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. I can be reached by phone or e-mail outside of those times. Please note: in line with current diocesan policy, anyone who comes into the building and interacts with other people must wear a mask.

While taking this step is not entirely unexpected, I know many of you will be disappointed and frustrated to receive this news. I share in it with you – particularly as we are now entering the third year of this pandemic, and there does not seem to be an end in sight. I grieve for the times of just being together as a community of God’s people that we have lost. At the same time, it is important to remember that this return to online worship has an end point. It’s not the indefinite shutdown we experienced last winter. Nor will we be starting from the proverbial Square One when we return.

It is also important to remember – and even to celebrate! – the fact that we have done an incredible job of caring for one another and adapting to a really tough set of circumstances. I give thanks daily for that – and hope you do, too.

Please continue to pray for the good health and safety of our church and our town.
Peace,

The Rev. Amy Spagna
Rector