

June 6, 2020

From the Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, Texas:



Good afternoon, all,

Here is letter #2 for the week. This one, as promised, is concerning our parish's work toward resuming in-person gatherings at St. Stephen's in a way that also respects and protects the well-being of our loved ones.

As you have heard me say before, we really want to resume gathering in-person with one another because we cherish community at St. Stephen's. It is exactly because we cherish the people in our community that we want to keep them as safe as we can. We also know that some of us are eager to resume, some of us are anxious about resuming, and many of us are a mix of both! Your vestry, staff, and I take our responsibility as the leaders of our church very seriously. We would much rather look back on this time and realize we were more cautious than we needed to be than realize we weren't cautious enough and someone we love got hurt.

That being said, your church leadership has appointed a committee to help with all the planning that goes into us resuming in-person gatherings. They are working together with me, the church staff, and the bishops and staff of the Diocese of Texas. You all are in great hands as we do this planning work, but we could also use your help! I have included a survey here:

<https://forms.gle/yXS38zUzZRYMAyGm9>

This survey will provide the committee with valuable information as we plan. I deeply appreciate your participation.

Finally, just to give you a sense of our timeline, these are the factors that will allow us to resume in-person gatherings:

- Completion of the survey by as many parishioners as possible (hopefully within the next week)
- The bishop approves our committee's plan for resuming (reasonably within the next couple weeks)
- We have acquired all of the sanitizing supplies, masks, and other equipment we need (most items have already been ordered, some high-demand items may take longer to arrive)
- The number of new cases of COVID-19 in Beaumont needs to continue to diminish. (if the numbers begin rising again, it will delay resuming). If you want to track that along with me, please check out <https://tabexternal.dshs.texas.gov/t/THD/views/COVIDExternalQC/COVIDTrends>

I wish I could give you a clearer timeline than that, but as you can see some of these factors are outside of our control. I do promise you that I will stay in prompt communication with you about it. I pray that we will resume soon, but not sooner than it is safe.

In the meantime, I want to thank everyone who has been gathering with us for worship, fellowship, and formation in these past months. I know it hasn't been the way we've wanted to do it, but your spirit of creative engagement has allowed us to keep on being the inclusive, hospitable lovers of community for which St. Stephen's is known throughout town. We are still St. Stephen's and we couldn't be who we are without you.

I look forward to seeing you tomorrow for worship at 8am or 10am, tomorrow for formation at 9am, Monday for fellowship at 8am, or one of our many other opportunities at [www.StStephensBmt.org](http://www.StStephensBmt.org). May God bless us all for the call we answer!

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'S'.

The Rev. Steven M. Balke, Jr.