
It's Almost Time!

It's almost time for us to be worshipping together in the Cathedral without wearing masks. It's almost time for us to be receiving communion from a common cup.

For me, it's been about time, for some time! And I have talked to many of you, and many others about it. In both agreement and disagreement. I have talked to parents who have been wary to return to church until their young children have been safely vaccinated. Of course, I have talked to others who may not even vaccinate their children when vaccinations do become possible for them. Then, there are many older people who have been safely vaccinated for some time! Thank you! We all know that covid cases have subsided because of those vaccinations! I have understood most of those perspectives.

Further, I have talked to our own bishop, and to other bishops, about receiving the consecrated wine, the blood of Christ, from a common cup. They all know I have been in favor of resuming that practice for some time. Some have said that we should wait for the CDC to say it is safe to do so. My response has been that I doubt that will happen! The CDC, and almost any health expert, will always be wary of saying it is healthy to drink from a cup that someone else has just drunk from! There has rarely, if ever, been a statement from any health professional that the common cup meets all pure health protocols!

Instead, for centuries, the Christian Church – and the sacramental churches in particular—have risked drinking from the common cup, as a sign of unity with our crucified Lord, and as a sign of unity with each other. Every generation or so, often during times of public health uncertainty, people have refrained from drinking from the common cup; and they have asked many a parish priest, “Is it healthy?” The faithful priest, over centuries, has gently replied that he or she cannot prove the health of the practice, but that the practice of drinking from a common cup is overwhelmingly powerful and does not seem to have caused injury. Thus, the holy practice has endured, following the commandment of the Lord, “Drink this, all of you” (Matthew 26:27-28).

Unfortunately, there were years during the time of medieval cathedrals when the powers-that-be prohibited laypeople from receiving wine from the common cup, because –they intimated— laypeople did not know how to receive it safely. That practice revealed a clericalism of the worst sort. Here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, a modern cathedral, we are different; we do well to trust each other! Laypeople and clergy people!

It's about time. It's about time to resume the risks that most of us were accustomed to risking two years ago. Two years ago, there was always some safety risk in participating in common worship; there always has been. Just as there is risk in riding in an automobile or in an airplane. We cannot be guaranteed, anywhere, that we will be completely safe and healthy. It is foolish absolutism to think that we can be guaranteed complete safety in our world. And those who demand that our institutions and leaders and followers provide absolute purity sound much like the followers of Leviticus purity law! (I mentioned around six months ago, that reading the ongoing and changing covid protocols was much like reading the purity laws in the Book of Leviticus!)

It's about time. Watch these pages. We are making transitions gradually these days, and this article is not yet the announcement. But it's almost time. For a while, and maybe for some time, there will be those who desire to wear masks. That will be fine, just as it always has. For a while, and maybe for some time, there will be those who do not want to drink from a common cup. And that will be fine, just as it always has. Each of us will have our own choice, our own freedom, and our own responsibility not to expose others to disease. We can do that.

It's almost time. But I sure do look forward to the time. I look forward to the time when we are free – when we are free to worship and eat and drink and breathe together, and when we are free to take risks together, each in our own time. “Let my people go,” declared Moses; and Paul developed that cry, “For freedom Christ has set us free.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Rev. Sam Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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