

## The Journey Forward continues

In the course of the summer we have seen our entire diocese move to a lower risk level (Yellow or Medium Risk on [covidactnow.org](https://covidactnow.org)) in June, but many counties in our diocese have returned to a higher risk level (Orange or High Risk) since then and, in the case of Essex County for a week or so, even a brief return to Red or Very High Risk level. As of this writing at the end of July, all our counties are Orange/High except for one Yellow/Medium county. These recent changes in risk levels weren't from daily case numbers, which many of us became accustomed to watching and tracking day by day – and rejoicing when they finally started declining in April and May. The risk level changes we've seen in the last two months or so have been to an increasing **infection rate**.

Ideally, the infection rate should be as low as possible – it represents, on average, how many people one infected person is infecting. When the infection rate is less than 1, then that means that the number of infected people is shrinking and not growing. Above 1 means that the number of people infected will be increasing. The growing presence of the delta variant of COVID-19 is likely a large part of this increase in infection rate, since it is much, much more contagious than the previous strains of COVID that we have seen.

What this means for our churches is to continue to keep up the very good work you all have been doing throughout this pandemic – though it is weary work at this point. All of us are well and truly “done” with this pandemic, but it is not, it seems, done with us just yet.

In fact, our Diocesan Confirmation services have had to make several changes to adjust to risk level shifts. When a Confirmation service is in a county that turns Orange/High, then we have had to reduce the music and singing, limit the altar party to a minimum, and omit Communion, to keep the service shorter and to reduce the number of people gathering. We actually moved an entire Confirmation service out of Essex County on short notice, because the risk level had moved to Red/Very High, which meant that we couldn't gather in-person, according to our guidelines. By moving it to a safer location, we could still have the service.

Anyone can access the [covidactnow.org](https://covidactnow.org) information – it's updated every day usually around 1 pm ET -and you can put in your county to see the current risk factors and risk level – as well as other statistics like the fully vaccinated percentage and the 1-shot vaccinated percentage. I encourage every congregation to have someone who monitors that site on a daily basis for your county – many of our clergy and wardens already do, but anyone could offer to do so. When a change happens in risk level, that may mean a