



## UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS IN THE DIOCESE OF MISSOURI

MAY 1, 2020 THE FEAST OF ST. PHILIP & ST. JAMES, APOSTLES

*"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."*

-Ephesians 4:4-6

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Our lives, our church, and our world have changed drastically since the emergence of COVID-19. The past few weeks have been filled with sorrows and blessings, challenges and opportunities, losses and celebrations. There is much to grieve and much to celebrate. God has indeed been our refuge and our strength during this time of trouble.

As we continue to live more fully into transition here in the Diocese of Missouri, none of us could have imagined the context in which we find ourselves. While it has been complicated and challenging in many ways, it has also been a deeply energizing and life-giving experience to walk this journey with you. You have demonstrated in countless ways the pioneering, creative, and innovative spirit that forms our spiritual DNA here in Missouri. We have discovered anew that we are one body together in the risen Christ.

As developments around COVID-19 continue to manifest at a rapidly changing rate, communities of faith in the Diocese of Missouri will continue to be closed at least until May 31, 2020. This inevitably leads to the question, "When can we return to worship?"

Following the guidance of health experts, in-person worship may resume in the Diocese of Missouri on June 1, 2020, provided that the following criteria are met:

- COVID-19 cases are on the decline for 14 days in your county.
- Testing is available for those showing symptoms.<sup>1</sup>
- A plan to safely resume worship is submitted to the Bishop's office.

When these conditions are met, the Bishop's office may give permission to return to in-person worship following appropriate guidelines as outlined in this document and recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control, and the local Department of Health and Public Safety. Even when in-person worship resumes, we will not "get back to normal" for some time.

The guidance that follows is intended to address this new reality in which we find ourselves and the practical reality of continuing the work of Christ in the world. It is intended to be a resource for clergy, vestries and bishop's committees to consider in advance of offering in-person worship. Setting clear expectations and sharing plans with our communities in advance, will help tremendously in making the return to in-person worship joyful, meaningful, and above all safe.

As we chart this new course, may God bless and keep you, those you love, and those whom you serve, now and always.

The Rt. Rev. Wayne Smith,  
10<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Missouri

The Rev. Deon K. Johnson,  
11<sup>th</sup> Bishop-elect of Missouri

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<sup>1</sup> Check with your local Health Department and [MapDash](#) Data resource for up-to-date area COVID-19 data.

## INTRODUCTION

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*"Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning." -Psalm 30*

Worship and service are at the heart of who we are as Christians and the compelling command by Jesus to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Christianity has faced crises with grace and hope and like our spiritual ancestors, we too, will land on the other side of COVID-19 transformed. The church will be strengthened by strain and stress, and we will emerge, regather, as a reimagined community.

As we plan for the resumption of in-person worship it is important to be reminded that we will live into a new normal. We cannot simply go back to "how things were." There will be grief and loss over what has been lost, coupled with hope and excitement in imagining what could be. This is all a part of the sacred mystery in which God remains our refuge and strength.

We are grateful to the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia whose work serves as the foundation of these guidelines. These guidelines are intended to be an aid in developing a plan for each worshipping community taking context and demographics into consideration.

Once plans for in-person worship have been developed, please email them to:  
Canon Doris Westfall [dwestfall@diocesemo.org](mailto:dwestfall@diocesemo.org).

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## CONTINUE ONLINE OPTIONS

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Even when in-person worship is allowed, some within our communities will be appropriately concerned about returning. It will be helpful to continue practices you have developed during the sheltering in place orders, whether that is creating your own online offerings or encouraging the congregation to attend online worship offered by other congregations across the Episcopal Church. Do not automatically assume that continuing to provide everything you have been offering online will be sustainable for your personal workload. Inviting others to engage with leading online worship opportunities will be a key component to this transition.

## WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

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While the physical distancing orders are in place, the return to group worship in a confined space will need to include:

- Keeping at least six feet between all persons who do not live in the same household and
- Wearing masks to enter and/or having masks on hand.
- Consider making announcements at the beginning of worship to reinforce expected norms.

This spacing is also recommended for any contact our parishioners may have. Consider a coffee hour that does not include serving any food or beverages while these orders remain in place. This will not prevent people from talking to one another, but will reduce the temptation towards unsafe behaviors. We want to encourage people to safely interact with one another, yet we cannot control behavior. The responsibility for keeping at least six feet between persons lies with each individual. We can, however, name the norms for our gatherings, ask everyone to abide by them, and even request people not participate if they cannot.

## CHANGING THE SCHEDULE AND LOCATION OF WORSHIP

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As a result of the limitations on the number who can gather and how much distancing is required, your worship space may not safely accommodate all who wish to gather for a liturgy. Adding additional liturgies or moving to a larger space, like a parish hall or outdoor settings, will help people keep safe physical distance. Consider how you might divide worship services including asking A-K to attend one of the new options and L-Z the other. Also decide who will keep a count on those in worship and how you will ask those attending after the capacity is reached to wait until a later service.

## SANITIZING THE CHURCH & OUTSIDE GROUPS

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Prior to resuming in-person worship all common spaces in the worship space should be thoroughly cleaned. Using a professional cleaning service is highly recommended. Please contact the Bishop's office if professional cleaning is a financial hardship.

When in-person worship resumes hard surfaces should be cleaned after each gathering and in between a series of worship services in the same space. There should also be a thorough final cleaning after all but the cleaning crew have left the church grounds.

For groups that meet outside the regular worshipping community, A.A., Contractors, Quilters etc., have a plan for how they will use and clean the building after use.

## GREETING AND HANDOUTS

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As we gather for in-person worship we will still need to use printed materials and make first time visitors feel welcome. Where possible email bulletins to congregation and invite them to use their tablets or smart phones in worship. Have a greeter or usher, standing six feet away, staff a welcome table with the needed materials available for pick-up. The greeter can offer a welcome and answer questions from a safe distance.

Books for worship should be removed and "quarantined" for a 14 day period prior to use.

To avoid people touching door handles/knobs, keep the church doors open during worship. Consider using handouts that can be taken home after worship or recycled, but not re-used. Consider having masks available for members and visitors.

## **CHOIR**

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During this transition, consider forgoing a choir and simply use soloists or duets. If you have a choir, each member must maintain the physical distancing requirement and is strongly encouraged to wear a mask.

## **PASSING THE PEACE**

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While the peace is often a time of social interaction in most communities of faith, while the physical distancing measures are in place, we need to have touch-free greetings at the peace with no shaking hands and hugging. Clergy and lay leaders in worship should model a wave or a bow while staying in place.

## **OFFERING PLATES & GIVING**

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The practice of "passing the plate" is discouraged during this time. The offering plates can be placed visibly within the community gathered and offerings can be placed during the offertory in one location. In advance of worship, set the expectation of online giving or mailing in checks.

## **WORSHIP SERVICES INCLUDING THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

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If you choose not to offer Eucharist, you may offer Morning Prayer or Ante-Communion on Sunday morning. Our experience suggests faithful Episcopalians expect the Eucharist, so put in place a plan for safe administration, and how you will orchestrate your movements. Think through how you will minimize person-to-person contact for administering the sacrament; how you will sanitize and re-sanitize while you administer the sacrament; and, how you will orchestrate your movements. This will vary for each congregation and space. Consider how persons can come one at a time and return to their seat without getting too close to others.

Consider the use of masks by the celebrant at the Holy Eucharist or cover the elements being consecrated. The Book of Common Prayer, at the time of consecration states, "*At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or to lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.*" Consecration therefore can be accomplished with a minimum of gestures for reasons of safety.

## **rites & rituals**

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Offering the Holy Eucharist safely will continue to be a challenge, as touching a face mask (to remove or shift it) contaminates it. Proximity to the communicant is a risk to the communion minister and those receiving. Give serious consideration to options within your tradition that minimize contact. This may mean you need to further postpone offering Communion.

Rituals (weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations) could take place in a more traditional way, with careful attention to guest lists so as to keep under the gathering limit, and physical distancing plans.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE PROCEDURES**

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Keep office functions as limited as possible to ensure essential operations. Those in the office should be wearing masks; if you have more than one person in the office, make sure that surfaces, including the phone, are regularly sanitized.

## CORRECT UNSAFE PRACTICES

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Some parishioners will stand too close to others, offer a hand to shake, or a hug. It is going to happen. Teach everyone the safe practices you intend to keep, in advance. Remind your community of faith that each person is responsible for themselves. Give parishioners or vestry persons who have the gift of offering a gracious word the task of giving guidance to those who struggle to change their behavior. Consider that some parishioners may need to be gently encouraged to stay home a little longer.

## REVISIT THE PLAN REGULARLY

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Do-Reflect-Do. This will be important as we return to in-person gatherings. Make a plan, carry it out, and then have a follow up meeting to reflect on how it went and what needs to change. An iterative process will be necessary to make the adjustments based on experience.

## QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP TO CONSIDER<sup>2</sup>

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We offer this list of questions for the leadership of each worshipping community to consider in devising a plan for in-person worship. We recommend that you work through these questions before re-launch:

- How will you maintain online streaming and how will that need to adjust when there is also in-person worship happening?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping in family groups sitting 6 feet apart?
- How will you discourage the receiving line after church and/or congregating after worship services?
- How will you cap attendance at events so there is room for members of the community to join you and so you don't go over guidelines?
- How will Christian formation take place? How might you create or continue online formation for children, youth, and adults?
- What should be done with small groups who have shifted to meeting online? How might you continue these when in-person worship resumes?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection in regards to communal spaces?
  - Worship bulletin disposal, prayerbooks, hymnals etc.
  - Areas where small groups gather during the week
  - Nurseries and/or playgrounds
  - Pews or chairs following worship
  - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in your building
- How will you update your building use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual while maintaining privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

## RESOURCES

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[MapDash-COVID-19](#) -an online resource for checking COVID-19 data on a local level  
[Centers for Disease Control](#) –Vast resource for COVID-19 precautions and suggestions

- [Cleaning your facility](#) –guide for building cleaning.
- [Sanitizing Office Spaces](#) –a step by step guide on frequently used spaces
- [Preparedness for Sacred Spaces](#) –a set of best practices for religious institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Wisconsin Council of Churches, <https://www.wichurches.org/>