



“Guidelines for Congregations that decide to Resume In Person Worship”

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul encourages us to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” who did not insist upon asserting his own privilege or prerogatives—but who “emptied himself” of his rights and suffered for the well-being of others. Over the past several weeks, in response to concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 virus, we in The Episcopal Church have suspended in-person gatherings and emptied our church buildings in order to protect one another and our neighbors from the spread of COVID-19. Far from ceasing to worship, however, these actions follow what our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has called “the rubric of love.” To walk in the footsteps of Jesus is to walk the way of love which is our highest service to God. This lean season has taught us to love one another in deeper ways as we have come to appreciate our family in Christ, all the more.

We are experimenting with new ways of gathering virtually for prayer and mutual encouragement. Many of us have become more intimately acquainted with the treasure-trove of worship and devotion bound up in our Book of Common Prayer. The Daily Office is receiving renewed attention and lay leadership is growing. Despite the limitations of the moment, the Holy Spirit of God continues to draw us together, binding us in love for one another around the rites and liturgies of our tradition.

As a result, we continue to grow stronger in faith and more unified in resolve as we answer the call placed upon us by Jesus Christ.

We are all eager to return to gathering in person. However, our joyful anticipation should be tempered with wisdom. We must move forward carefully, not existing in fear, but moving forward with care and prudence. As Christ is exalted through humility and service, so we will continue to seek the safety of everyone through a phased return. The following guidelines are offered with this intention, that at every step we take

together into this new normal, we will continue to be directed by the liberating and life-giving love of God, respecting the dignity and welfare of every human being.

Since March 15th, churches, schools, and institutions have been emptied in an attempt to flatten the COVID-19 curve. While this has been difficult for us, it has also mitigated the rate of infection within our communities. This is where we are, currently:

- Virtual worship
- Bible Study/Fellowship opportunities offered virtually
- Engaging new ways of doing church
- Regular updates from the Bishop and Clergy

Going Forward

Gathering Guidelines

The following guidelines are to be followed for resumption of “In Person” Worship at churches in the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma. These guidelines pertain to regularly scheduled principal weekend worship services. Mid-week services, meetings, and all other gatherings continue to be suspended. Services such as burials or weddings may only be conducted in consultation with the Bishop.

“After due consideration of these guidelines, worship may resume in the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma as of Sunday, June 14, 2020, however may be rescinded in the interest of public health”. In the time between the issuance of these guidelines and resumption of worship, congregations are encouraged to prepare by acquiring the necessary supplies to address the required sanitizing protocols listed below. Congregations are not required resume In Person Worship if they cannot meet these guidelines or have concerns for the health and safety of church members, staff, or clergy. Additionally, any clergy member who identifies as a “Vulnerable” person is not required to participate in resuming worship. Clergy and congregations are encouraged to consult with the Bishop if there are concerns or questions.

Please be aware that these guidelines may be modified, or worship suspended depending on public health conditions and guidance by health authorities or public officials.

**** PLEASE NOTE: Any Positive Tests of Covid 19 in congregations should be reported to the Bishop's Office Immediately...**

1. Pre-Worship Preparation

- a. Churches are encouraged to continue "Virtual Worship" as an option.
- b. Persons considered as "Vulnerable" due to existing medical conditions or advanced age should consider Virtual Worship in lieu of "In Person" Worship.
- c. Anyone experiencing any signs of illness should not attend "In Person" Worship.
- d. All persons attending worship are encouraged to wear masks.
- e. All Churches must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized prior to the resumption of "In Person" Worship.
 - Hand-Sanitizer stations should be established throughout the facility.
 - Bathrooms must be stocked with sanitizer wipes to be used when entering and exiting the facility.
 - All pews, altar rails, entry doors and other "common touch" areas will be sanitized prior to resuming worship.
- f. Churches having multiple services
 - Churches with multiple services will remove all Prayer Books and Hymnals from the nave and pew backs to avoid potential contamination.
 - Printed bulletins are to be used once, then disposed of or taken home.
 - All "common touch" areas as identified above will be sanitized between each service.
 - Restrooms should be checked/restocked with sanitizer wipes.
- g. Arrangements should be made to prop open entry doors; or have a designated person assigned to open and close doors as persons come and go.

- h. A stationary offering plate/receptacle should be placed in an accessible location to receive Offering Gifts.
- i. Holy Water stoups and Baptismal Fonts will remain without water.
- j. Nurseries, Crying Rooms, Fellowship Halls, Classrooms, and any other gathering spaces should remain closed.
- k. No beverages or snacks are to be served before or after services.
- l. Pews, chair rows, seating should be roped off or designated in some way to allow for proper social distancing. Only every other pew, chair row, or seating may be utilized. Individuals and family units should be spaced six (6) feet apart.
- m. Thought should be given about how to communicate to parishioners the worship space has reached capacity.

2. Worship Team: Clergy / Staff/ Lay Leaders

- Anyone experiencing any signs of illness, including Clergy, should not attend “In Person” Worship.
- Each Worship Team Member will have their temperature checked upon arrival. Anyone with a temperature above 100 degrees should not participate.
- All Worship Team Members are encouraged to wear masks.
- Social distancing practices should be used when vesting or preparing for worship.
- Worship Team Members should wash / sanitize hands prior to participating in leading worship.

3. Those Attending Worship

- a. Anyone experiencing any signs of illness should not attend “In Person” Worship.
- b. Persons considered as “Vulnerable” due to existing medical conditions or advanced age should consider “Virtual Worship” in lieu of “In Person” Worship.
- c. Persons should avoid touching when greeting one another. Given our current circumstances a wave, bow, or smile, can be as loving as a hug or handshake.

- d. All persons attending worship are encouraged to wear masks.
 - Personal homemade masks are acceptable.
 - Mask should be made available for anyone who does not have a mask and chooses to wear one.
 - e. Service / Worship Bulletins should be distributed by a gloved and masked usher or another designated person.
 - f. Upon entering the Nave or worship space, seating is limited to every other pew while maintaining six (6) feet between household units.
 - Pews will be roped-off or otherwise marked to indicate non-use.
4. If possible, overflow areas that maintain proper social distancing should be available once seating is full.

Worship

- a. Music:

Note: When we sing, the droplets from our voices travel a greater distance than when speaking. To ensure the safest environment, the following guidelines are in effect:

- Choir/Praise Bands must maintain spacing of six feet apart for the entirety of the service, facing away from the congregation.
- Choirs should be limited to four people.
- Praise Bands should be limited to six musicians.
- The use of horns or wind instruments is prohibited.
- Congregational singing is strongly discouraged.

- b. Altar Party

- Participants will sit six feet apart.
- One lay-reader is permitted per service.
- One Acolyte is permitted per service.
- No Vergers.

- c. Communion

- Communion of one-kind (bread) will be permitted.

- Only wafers may be used, gluten-free and regular, No homemade bread.
 - Clergy will refrain from touching communicants' hands during administration.
 - Clergy will sanitize their hands immediately prior to distributing communion.
 - Only the Celebrant will administer communion.
 - Clergy are encouraged to distribute communion from a "Standing Communion Station" to avoid contamination of Communion rails. Should persons be allowed to kneel at the altar rail to receive communion, the communion rail will be sanitized in between each group coming forward to receive.
 - Wine will only be consumed by the Celebrant.
 - Clergy will wear a mask throughout the administration of Communion.
 - Following communion, clearing of the altar should be completed by one person only.
- d. Masks may be removed while preaching, reading, or celebrating the Eucharist, if the distance from the nearest person is ten feet or more.
- e. There should be no physical contact during the exchange of the Peace. A wave bow or smile can be as loving as a hug or a handshake.

5. Post-Worship

- a. Proper social distancing should be maintained as persons depart from the church. Clergy may stand outside or at a distance to greet parishioners as they leave. Hugs and handshakes should be avoided.
- b. There should be no fellowship or coffee hour gatherings following worship. No beverages or food should be served.
- c. All vessels, lapel microphones, lecterns and lectern microphones, handheld microphones, or any other items during worship should be cleaned and sanitized after each service.

6. Miscellaneous

- a. Mid-week services, meetings, and all other gatherings continue to be suspended and should continue as virtual or online only.

- b. Staff and Clergy should work from home as much as possible.
- c. All vendors/visitors during the week will wear masks when inside the building.
- d. Groups such as AA, Scouts, etc. may use church facilities at the discretion of the Rector / Vicar/ Priest in Charge if proper social distancing is maintained and CDC guidelines are followed. Any space used by outside groups must be cleaned and sanitized immediately following use.

The churches and institutions of the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma have demonstrated remarkable faith, hope, and love in this Easter season. Even amidst the challenges of COVID-19, we have known the new life of the Risen Christ in our lives and communities. We have loved God, and our neighbors. We've stretched ourselves and our capabilities, in order to reach out to others. It's been difficult, but we've persevered. As we move into Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit continue to guide and strengthen us to do God's will.