

INDOOR WORSHIP TO RESUME!

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I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the LORD! (Psalm 122:1)

With great joy, we are heartened to see that percent positivity rates for the Commonwealth of Virginia have remained at or below 8 percent for 14 days or more. In consultation with the Health Advisory Panel, the Bishop is pleased to lift the restriction on indoor in-person worship and other gatherings. The following protocols remain in effect:

Safe Worship and Re-gathering Protocols

1. **Parish leadership (Clergy and Vestry) must determine that public worship is safe** in their particular locality. No clergy person will be required to conduct services if he/she deems it unwise for the congregation or an unacceptable risk for the clergy person.
2. **Approved plans:** Parishes previously submitting and obtaining approval for a written plan detailing worship protocols during the pandemic (prior to the second suspension of in-person worship in December) may resume indoor and outdoor worship subject to the specifics of their plan and the requirements below. Parishes that have not developed and submitted a plan for approval must do so prior to resuming public worship. [Click here for planning guidelines.](#)
3. **A designated Health Coordinator or Health Equity Team** shall assure the parish's compliance with best practices and current state, local, and diocesan guidelines.
4. **Worship: At all worship services, the following protocols must be followed:**
 - a. Conduct worship outdoors whenever possible.
 - b. Assure 6-foot physical distancing per person or family residing together.
 - c. Require that all wear masks covering the nose and mouth. Assure that masks available. Masks may be removed only for specific aspects of worship (reading Scripture, preaching or addressing the congregation, or receiving communion).
 - d. Establish patterns of directional movement where possible to limit proximity.
 - e. Designate separate doors for entry and exit where possible.
 - f. Remove all prayer books, hymnals, and Bibles from the pews. Encourage worshipers to bring personal prayer books from home or use single-touch or no-touch (electronic) bulletins.
 - g. No congregational singing. [Click here for guidelines for soloists, cantors, or choirs and limited choral singing at Easter.](#)
 - h. Discontinue use of the holy water font.
 - i. Provide hand sanitizer at entrances, exits, and elsewhere as appropriate.
 - j. Establish a touch-free method to collect offerings (no passing of the alms basin).
 - k. No physical passing of the peace.

- I. Holy Communion may be distributed if the clergy person in charge of the parish determines that it is safe to do so. Communion may be distributed in individual sealed containers ([click here](#)) or in one kind with no more than one individual approaching the altar or rail at a time. The priest distributing communion must wash his or her hands thoroughly before distributing communion and avoid tactile contact with each communicant. [Click here for additional pandemic guidelines for the administration of Holy Communion](#). If Holy Communion is not distributed, a prayer for spiritual communion may be offered. [Click here](#).
- m. Track the number and record the name/phone of those attending.
- n. Employ a plan for dismissal in an orderly sequence to maintain physical distance.
- o. Baptisms, Funerals, Weddings, and Ordinations are subject to the same protocols and consideration should be given to postponement to permit full attendance. At baptisms, parents should hold the infant to be baptized throughout the rite, and after the priest blesses the water the parents shall pour it over the infant's head as the priest pronounces the words of baptism. Chrismation may be deferred until a later date, if feasible, or administered by the priest using a cotton ball.
- p. Thoroughly clean and sanitize all public spaces before and after worship (and in-between services if multiple services are offered).

5. **General safeguards and practices:**

- a. Educate all congregants to assure compliance, to include not attending worship if unwell or exposed to the coronavirus in the past 14 days.
- b. Post signage regarding mandatory observance of CDC and Virginia Public Health protocols including the wearing of masks, 6-foot physical distancing, and not attending if ill, symptomatic, or exposed to the coronavirus in the past 14 days.
- c. Maintain suspension of in-person coffee hour until further notice.
- d. Provide virtual services to the full extent possible.
- e. In-person church meetings may be held provided 6-foot physical distancing is maintained, masks are required, hand sanitizer is made available, and meeting spaces are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized beforehand and afterward. [Click here for protocols specific to congregational or annual meetings](#).
- f. Christian formation may be offered in person for adults only, provided 6-foot physical distancing is maintained, masks are required, hand sanitizer is made available, and the space is thoroughly cleaned and sanitized beforehand and afterwards. Until further notice, Christian formation for youth and children may be offered by virtual means only. [Click here for formation gathering protocols](#).
- g. Nurseries shall remain closed.
- h. Other groups seeking to use the facilities (AA, Scouts, etc.) must maintain 6-foot physical distancing, wear masks covering nose and mouth, use hand sanitizer, sanitize all spaces used beforehand and afterward, and not attend if ill, symptomatic, or exposed to the coronavirus within 14 days.
- i. Sustain support services such as food pantries and services to the homeless in a manner that safeguards the health of all and mitigates the risk of transmission.

- j. Day schools should follow the practices and protocols required in their district.
- 6. **Regularly monitor the percent positivity** in the health district within which the parish is located. If the two-week percent positivity rises above 8% consider suspension of worship. If the two-week percent positivity rises to 10% or higher, immediately suspend all public gatherings including worship. [Click here to access current positivity rates by locality.](#)