



The Diocese of Southeast Florida A Customary for the Seasons of Re-Entry and Re-Gathering

Introduction

All of us long for a return to in-person worship and the opening of our churches and church buildings, but we also know that such a return depends on when and whether we can do so safely. In discerning the seasons and the right time, the document *On Being Faithful* is our primary guide for re-entry and re-gathering during this COVID time.

This Customary complements *On Being Faithful*, and includes *Practices and Protocols* for the conduct of worship when it becomes possible to re-gather for in-person worship in our churches and other spaces. This Customary governs **all worship**, irrespective of location, until further notice.

Until further notice, all who participate in any in-person activity, including worship, must wear masks at all times, and gloves where necessary or advised. All who wish may wear gloves at any time.

Public Worship

When Season II has opened, and until further notice, re-gathering for worship will require the following protocols:

- “Count them in; keep it short; watch your distance.”
- Numbers are to be limited. “Count them in.”
- Services are to be conducted in the shortest reasonable time, without having to rush. The principle is “Keep it short.”
- Care is to be taken about physical distancing at all times. “Watch your distance.”
- The wearing of face masks is obligatory for clergy and worshippers. The clergy wear their masks throughout the service.
- No paper bulletins. Make announcements, and project text and responses onto a screen or bulletin board. Consider emailing or posting the service bulletin online beforehand and invite people to bring their devices to follow along. It is helpful to have the bulletin online for online worshippers to consult. Most regular worshippers know the basic responses in the Eucharist by heart, and with a little encouragement will be able to worship without a book. Worshippers may bring their own Prayer Books from home, but may not share them.
- Instrumental or recorded music only – no choir or congregational singing. Singing is a potent method of transmission of aerosolized viruses.
- “Exchanging the Peace” with a bow or a wave.

- No receiving line of clergy as people exit the space.
- No coffee hours/receptions with food.
- Do not pass an offering plate from one person to another. Have the plate situated in a visible location and ask people to drop their offering into the plate directly.
- No church buildings are to be filled to capacity, not even for one-time events (weddings or funerals).
- Services may be held outdoors, but health and hygiene protocols remain the same.

If your typical Sunday attendance is larger than the specified number of people that are permitted at any stage of re-gathering, consider an online “reservation” system such as Eventbrite to assure adequate space. Also consider offering staggered services during the week.

The Celebration of the Holy Eucharist

Consider using Morning Prayer or the Liturgy of the Word only for the first few Sundays of re-gathered worship so that people can adjust to the safety restrictions before the higher-risk actions of Holy Communion.

- There should be no processions: as much as possible, the shortest way in to the sanctuary and the shortest way out, being careful to avoid close contact with worshippers on the way.
- When the Eucharist is celebrated, the celebrant shall be the only person at the altar. A credence table is to be set up within easy reach of the celebrant so that there is no need for a deacon, acolyte, or Eucharistic Minister to assist with the preparation of the altar.
- Although a small amount of wine is to be consecrated in the Chalice, the Chalice is reserved to the celebrant alone.
- Consecrated Wine is not to be reserved until further notice.

A safe and possible scenario for Holy Communion

- The celebrant prepares the altar, using regular metallic vessels – chalice and patten.
- Hands should be visibly sanitized before and after the altar is set.
- The celebrant visibly disinfects her/his hands immediately before coming to the altar for the Great Thanksgiving.
- The celebrant prays the Eucharistic Prayer, touching the vessels as the rubrics specify.
- The celebrant refrains from bowing the head low over the elements to avoid bringing the mouth close to the Hosts. Arm’s length is ideal.
- Following the Invitation to Communion, two methods of administration are authorised:
 - *Either*, the celebrant places the consecrated Hosts spread out on a corporal on a tray that is nearby for the purpose, so they may be retrieved one at a time by communicants.
 - The celebrant then takes the tray and places it on a table set out for the purpose before the service outside the altar rail or in some other convenient place where communicants may approach without the need of climbing steps.
 - *Or*, the celebrant may spread the consecrated hosts on the corporal on the altar, if the altar is easily accessible.

Then:

- With guidance from ushers, communicants line up single file, observing proper distancing.
- Use tape and/or signs to mark the appropriate distance to keep between people in line.
- Members of the same household do not need to observe social distancing with one another.
- *Either* communicants approach the table or altar one at a time, take the consecrated Host in their hand and return to their pew.
- When all have returned to their pews, the celebrant says the words of administration and all consume the Host together.
- *Or* as each communicant receives the Host at the table, the celebrant says the words of administration to each individual.
- Face masks are removed just prior to and replaced immediately after consuming the Host.
- The vessels are veiled and handled by the celebrant, and ablutions performed by the celebrant after the Eucharist is over.
- A small number of Consecrated Hosts may be reserved to communicate the gravely ill (when in-person visits to such members are possible) and to maintain the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the church. The Reserved Sacrament is to be renewed on a regular basis by the celebrant alone.
- The celebrant again disinfects hands.
- The service concludes as usual.
- Ushers release rows one at a time to ensure that exits do not become crowded as people depart the sanctuary.
- There is no “handshake line” at the back of the church.
- Supply hand sanitizer dispensers near the exits and at other high-traffic areas of the church and advise parishioners to use them as they depart.
- If the Eucharist is celebrated outdoors, provision must be made so that consecrated Hosts do not blow off the altar or table in the wind.

Occasional Offices

As far as possible, Occasional Offices are to be postponed until a safer time.

Baptisms may be performed if the congregation is open for in-person worship, with the limit of the persons attending that is required at the time that the baptism is scheduled. In other words, at the beginning of Season II, not more than 10 persons may be at that church service, including the priest, the candidate, parents, sponsors, and congregation.

- All are to keep the appropriate distance at the font.
- Babies and small children are to be held and helped by their parents.
- The priest conducts the rite as usual, blessing the water and so on as prescribed by the Prayer Book.
- The priest performs the baptism, using a shell, so that water is poured (not touched or sprinkled) on the candidate's head. The chrismation by the priest follows as usual. Only those who need to be in close proximity (the candidate, the priest, and a parent who is holding a baby or small child) may be at the font for the baptism itself and the chrismation.
- After the chrismation and welcome, all return to their places in the church.
- All candidates baptised during this season must be received at the church at a Sunday liturgy when the entire community can re-gather safely, as the Prayer Book provides.

Emergency baptism may be conducted according to the provision of the Prayer Book.

Marriages (where necessary) and funerals may be conducted, following the directives for maximum numbers and gatherings that apply at the time.

Pastoral Considerations

People may have great difficulty with social distancing. When we have been apart from friends and loved ones for a long time, and experienced the stress and grief of isolation, it is easy to ignore guidelines.

The best help for those who struggle with distancing is by example. Leaders and clergy can show by waves, smiles, and bowing with hands together that we can acknowledge one another's presence without breaking the principle of distancing.

Some people who have been sustained by hope for "worship back to normal" will be deeply disappointed by the distance restrictions, the absence of singing, the avoidance of hugs and handshakes, and the regimentation of "crowd control." Nothing will be back to "normal" for some time, and it is important to attend to this pastoral reality by honesty, formation, and on-going pastoral care.

Monitoring and Reporting

We are asking the deans to be the channels by which you report on your experiences of re-gathering:

- What has gone well?
- What has been challenging?
- What wisdom do you have for other faith communities?
- Have your people been united in their compliance with guidelines?

The Bishop, the Re-gathering Team, the Congregational Vitality team, and the Bishop's Office staff encourage you to continue investing in, practicing, and improving online/virtual worship, fellowship, study and governance. It is unlikely that we shall return to a time when these online opportunities can – or should – be discontinued. Please ask the Congregational Vitality Team for help.

Further Resources

- The Centers for Disease Control ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)), whose materials are comprehensive and excellent.
- Coronavirus: Safety Tips for Religious Organizations (Church Pension Group: [CPG.org](https://www.cpg.org)).
- Why Getting the US Back to Normal in the Next Couple Months is a Fantasy. PBS Newshour, April 20, 2020.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.