



Ascension Eve 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings in Christ. I am grateful for your perseverance and faithfulness in an unprecedeted time. Distribution of communion seems to have gone well. It has been clear for some weeks that the key things aren't necessarily the most obvious liturgical questions, but the hard work of phone check-ins, small groups, etc. I hear many good stories about this work.

1. For easy reference earlier communications can be found together on [our website](#).
2. We all are now facing into the reality of a longer haul and measuring the tower for what will be required for sustainability. As with everything about COVID, we learn as we go. We continue to watch the data, and are waiting a bit to see what the consequences of reopening will be, especially in Dallas County. Remember that no cleric or congregation is required to take a step they are not comfortable with.

I hope you will add your creative ideas in response to my blog ["The Good Enough Parish."](#)

3. We glean what we can from emerging science to our situation. Recent articles (including one from Dr. Erin Bromage, a biologist at the University of Massachusetts, which I discussed by phone with many of you) tell us important things about how infections most likely happen. For our purposes the takeaways are two:
  - a) congregational singing indoors is problematic, and
  - b) meetings outdoors, done wisely, are the most safe. We are trying not to be arbitrary, but to be guided in opening up as much as the best research allows. We will incorporate these facts into what follows.

4. As of Pentecost, May 31, and thereafter, all our congregations can worship outdoors, while keeping to the six-feet and masked rules. (This goes back to the roots of American Christianity, doesn't it?) In the open air you can sing! You may want an early service given the summer heat, but be consoled by the fact that hot and humid makes it even safer. Evensong is another option. (You might want to have the pre-consecrated bread ready should you be rained out.)

5. A summary of the in-person outdoor and indoor worship is included with this letter.

6. My best advice then is in-person worship (outdoor), in tandem with online worship (indoor). Two-track is the answer, for the near term. You can have choral singing in the streamed setting because you can have enough spacing. As I have said before, a congregation offering this alone is fully acceptable. Take the time now to figure out how you will approach this next step.

7. Let me refresh your memories about the steps for returning to worship in person and indoors. To refresh our memories: Step A- distributing communion. Step B- gathering of up to 10, distanced and masked. Step C- as many as can safely be included in your Church by the 'masks and 6 feet' rule, which you have actually measured and marked out, with attention to entrance and exit, as well as cleaning between services.

8. **Timetable:** **As of Pentecost Sunday, May 31, all churches move to Step B.** As of Trinity Sunday, June 7, all churches in counties other than Dallas, Denton, and, Collin, may move to Step C.

**Step C in the rest of our churches will be addressed in a future communication.**

9. Based on the research above, **indoor congregational singing is prohibited in Steps B and C.** (This is the case in several other Episcopal dioceses I am aware of).

10. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I continue with my earnest advice to older members (of which there are many, and of whom I am one!) to stay home.

11. Several of you have wondered what to do when a parishioner arrives who refuses to wear a mask. I advise you in the strongest terms to require masks of all for indoor worship, without exception. Do a lot of preparation beforehand, as you explain that the mask is for their neighbor primarily. If you are outdoors the stakes are lowered.

12. Obviously the relief review board will continue to accept applications for grants throughout the year. Meanwhile the Executive Council has approved a donation every month of \$5,000 to diocesan feeding programs and \$5,000 to South Dallas programs. You can find a link to Carrie's work with Churches in [South Dallas here.](#)

13. Congregational staff can come to the office as they need to, so long as they observe the safety rules. Don't let it become a place for folks to congregate. Working from home continues to be acceptable.

14. I have had inquiries about resources for the further evangelization, catechesis, and pastoral support in this difficult time. Resources may be found on our website on the [Covid-19 Hub](#) page.

15. Clergy may visit parishioners in emergency (non-COVID) situations. Masked of course. You may anoint, but limit the time you are there. Outdoor or backyard pastoral services are possible if they include the requisite safety protocols.

16. One might ask about the seeming gap between rules for reopening worship and for reopening schools. Quite simply, the former is my direct responsibility, while the latter has more complex oversight and a more varied audience. So the two will not be in perfect sync. On day cares and pre-schools, please follow the guidance of your local school district and licensing agency. Schools for older children differ

considerably in being more or less related to the parish with which they have an historic tie. They should make their decision in relation to the best advice of their own industry standards and civic guidelines. The wisdom of opening schools will differ from congregation to congregation.

17. Another pressing question is that of summer camps. Let me first say that our closure of Camp All Saints, sad though it be, remains in effect. Our concern for the difficult of distancing in overnight camp, as well as children then dispersing across the diocese, were the main reasons. As to VBS and summer day camp, our approach will be different. I will gather a working group to think about the issues around ministries for children outside of Sunday morning, and to consider proposals from congregations.

I pray for you all daily! I am grateful for your standing strong in such a challenging time. There walks with us in this furnace daily a fourth, one like the Son of Man ...to Him be the praise and glory, Amen.

Peace,

+GRS

### **Summary- In-person Worship Indoor and Outdoor EDOD, 2020**

#### **All our worship:**

- Includes masks for all
- Worshippers separated by 6 feet (measured and marked)
- Communion distributed by protocol, no common cup, no tactile peace, no collection plate going hand to hand, no usual coffee hour
- Ready entrance and exit

#### **Differences:**

- Outdoor may include congregational singing, while indoor may not
- Indoor should include cleaning between services, including bathrooms

+GRS