



May 14, 2020

To: • Wardens, Vestry Members & Treasurer
• Clergy & Staff
• Initial Pandemic Recovery Task Force members

From: The Rector

Re: • Pandemic Recovery Taskforce
• Initial guidance provided by the Diocese of Chicago for re-opening of parishes

Hello, all,

Information on the following pages is intended to provide us with a more-or-less common starting point for conversations, decisions, plans and actions that will lead by steps to resumption of worship, fellowship and ministries at Ascension.

I'm addressing this to a number of souls who have agreed to serve on a pandemic recovery task force (a final name for which will be one of the group's initial considerations). I also feel that I should share what follows with all Vestry members, all clergy and staff and a few others.

My introduction will certainly be incomplete and imperfect. We should all anticipate a time ahead and a process that – even with our best efforts, intentions and goodwill – will include new developments, challenges and questions. Our prayers and patience will be critical to our remaining not only physically but also spiritually healthy.

Please know of my gratitude, respect and prayers.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter +", with a small cross symbol at the end.



CHURCH
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**Pandemic Recovery Task Force &
Initial guidance provided by the Diocese of Chicago for re-opening of parishes**

General Background: This communication assumes that recipients are familiar with many features of the present pandemic, including directives from our governor, mayor and bishop. Some related links will be provided below.

The Task Force: The need for a parish task force was raised at our April Vestry meeting. At the invitation Wardens and Rector, these persons have agreed to serve as initial members:

Mary Beth Hwang
Patrick Johnston
Carol Noren
Br. Nathanael Rahm, BSG
Benjamin Rivera

As the nature and scope of our work evolve, other individuals may be added, either as regular or *ad hoc* task force members. The task force will be looking at every area of parish life and operations with an eye to minimizing risk and optimizing safety and health – not only **worship and music** but **fellowship and hospitality**, the **nursery, pastoral care, live-streaming and social media and related technology**, **HVAC** (Heating/Ventilating/Air Conditioning) **legal** matters, **budget and finance** considerations, and more.

Guidance from, and accountability to, the Bishop: Bishop Lee has already begun to provide guidance. He has also made it clear that he expects every congregation in the diocese to have a task force (however named or configured) and to be accountable to him for reasonably interpreting and conforming to guidance provided. His communications have so far been mainly by way of emails, newsletters and the weekly Zoom call with clergy and lay leaders, Wednesdays at Noon. Any of you receiving this may take part, and it may be in your interests to do so at least once.

On the following pages you will find some basic guidance provided by the bishop thus far. When available, you will also receive additional information expected in coming weeks.

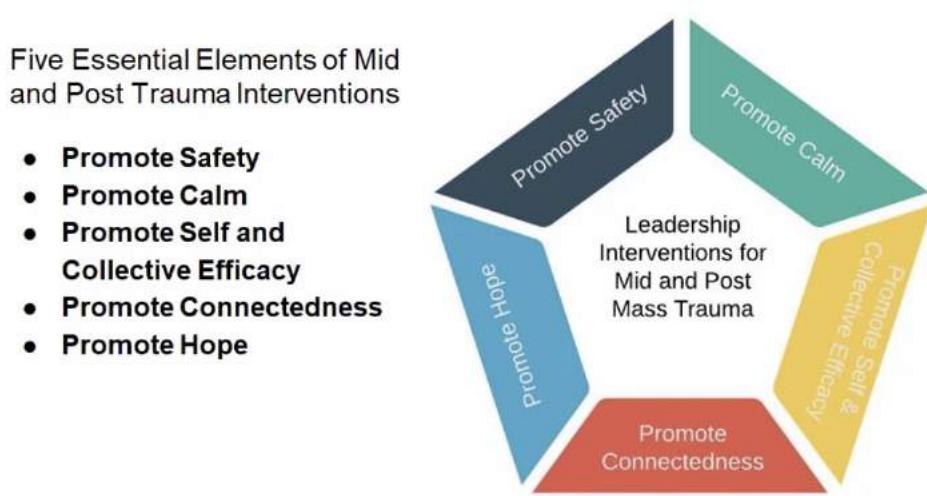
For your preliminary review:

- The materials on the following pages.
- [Governor Pritzker's May 5 Re-Opening Document: 'Restore Illinois'](#)
- [Article reviewing health risks posed by public singing as presented by a national panel recently convened by the National Association of Teachers of Singing.](#)



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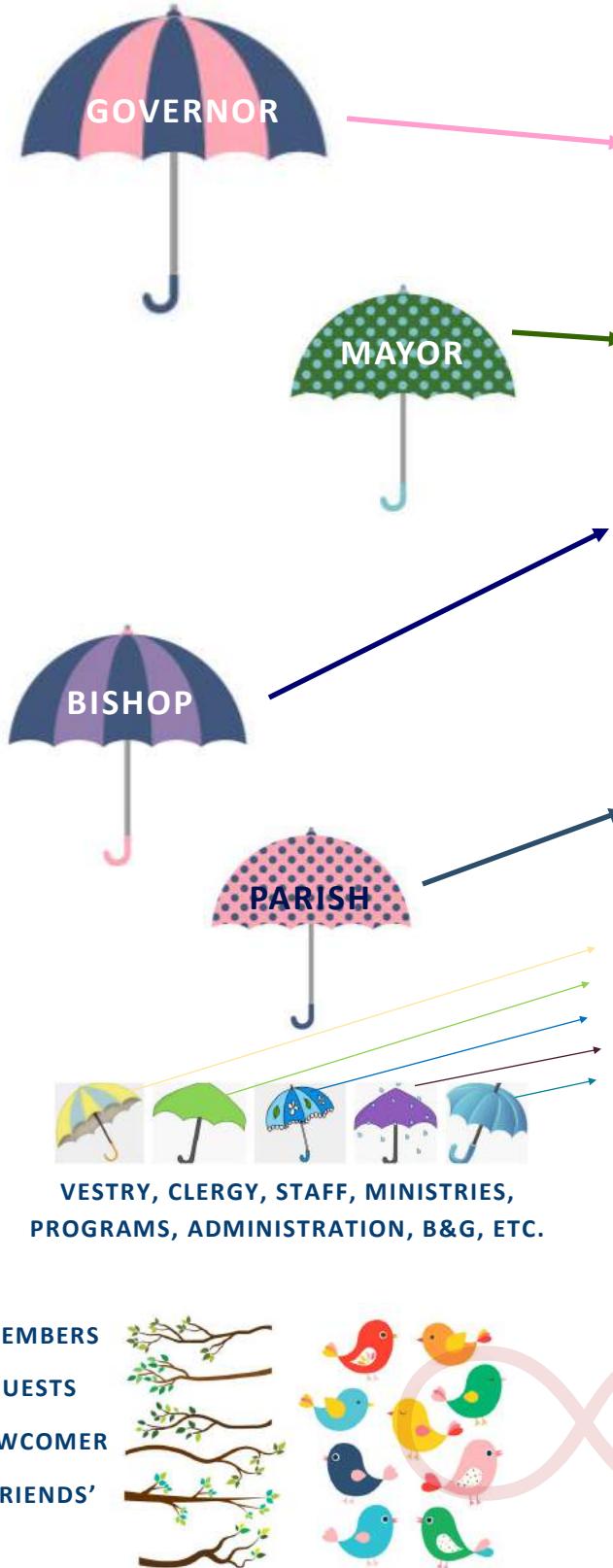
- **Leadership principles and priorities.** Bishop Lee has asked that all parish leaders at this time begin with and incorporate a priority of spiritual care and quality of relationships. The Rev. Ellen Ekevag, a part-time member of the bishop's staff and co-rector of Emmanuel Church, La Grange, made a presentation during the bishop's May 6 Zoom call that begin with and built on the following model.



This model assumes that not only many individuals but also parish systems as a whole are presently experiencing trauma due to rapid, unexpected and negative changes and fears about health, livelihoods, loved ones and the future. Additional information will be provided in days/weeks to come. Suggestions about additional related resources and practices are invited.



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**LINES OF AUTHORITY/COMMUNICATION/
ACCOUNTABILITY**

- * Bishop Lee has made it clear that he intends for the diocese as a whole and individual congregations to comply with Gov. Pritzker's guidance in all matters, including differing geographic 'zones' and phases of recovery.
- * Additionally, parishes and missions in the City of Chicago are to comply with any additional guidance or direction from Mayor Lightfoot.
- * Bishop Lee has appointed a task force and deputized a number of members of his staff to provide specific guidance for all Episcopal entities (mainly parishes and missions). Preliminary guidance is reflected in information on the following page(s). **Members of the bishop's staff are available to consult with individual congregations.**
- * Each congregation will develop and present to the bishop a comprehensive re-opening plan that incorporates guidance from the governor, mayor and diocese.
- * As previously described the Ascension task force will look at and consider a plan and best practices for not only **worship and music** but **fellowship and hospitality**, the **nursery**, **pastoral care**, **live-streaming and social media** and **related technology**, **HVAC (Heating/Ventilating/Air Conditioning)** **legal** matters, **budget and finance** considerations, and more.
- * Our Ascension leadership aim is to adapt the guidance of the governor, mayor and bishop to our circumstances at Ascension in order to serve the optimal physical, emotional and spiritual safety and health of our members, our guests (including those we serve through the food pantry), newcomers and 'friends of Ascension' (whether former members, those with Anglo-Catholic affinities and/or new 'virtual' friends).



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PAGE 1 OF 5: Slides from the presentation by the Rev. Courtney Reid, Operations Manager for the Diocese of Chicago, during the Bishop's May 13 Zoom Leadership call. The presentation is intended to communicate a general structure for congregations. A more detailed report will soon be provided by the bishop's own task force.

General Framework

- Process of re-entry is aligned with State of Illinois phased approach.
- Regions, and therefore congregations, may enter new phases at different times.
- Churches in Chicago will enter phases as determined by guidelines of Mayor's Office which may differ from their region.
- Clergy and congregation leadership work together to create plan for re-opening.
- Completion of plans will be reported to Bishop's Office.
- Bishop's staff remains available to meet with congregations as they develop their plans.



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PHASE TWO - Where we are now

Public Health indicators:

- *Slowing of new case growth*
- *Infection rate is beginning to stabilize*
- *Hospital capacity is stable*
- *Ability to perform 10,000 tests/day statewide*

Safety Guidelines for Phases 2-4

Physical Distancing: 6 feet between all persons not living in same household.

Face Coverings: All wear face coverings (masks, bandanas, scarfs)

Good Hygiene: Frequent hand-washing, sanitizing, and not touching face.

Cleanliness: Spaces are cleaned and sanitized after each use and thoroughly cleaned at end of day.

PHASE TWO - Where we are now

- Continue to use recorded music. Only live instrumental music (no wind instruments) is allowed. **NB Pipe organ not considered a 'wind instrument' and is OK.**
- Continue virtual meetings, formation, programs.
- In person pastoral visits discouraged except for emergencies. Continue telephone and other virtual pastoral care.
- Begin planning for re-opening of church offices.



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PHASE THREE

Public Health indicators:

- *Rate of infections is stable or declining.*
- *COVID-19 related hospitalization and ICU capacity is stable or decreasing.*
- *Testing widely available for those at risk, health care workers, first responders, staff and residents in congregate living facilities.*

PHASE THREE

Church Guidelines

- Churches may hold in-person worship in groups of 10 or fewer (10 includes altar party & congregation).
- Virtual worship options should continue for those unable to attend.
- Celebration of Eucharist allowed with modified rubrics.
- Baptisms allowed with modified rubrics.
- Weddings, Quinceañeras, and funerals allowed with a total group size of no more than 10 and observation of all safety guidelines.



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PHASE FOUR

Public Health indicators:

- *Continued decline in rate of new infections.*
- *Hospitals have capacity and can quickly adapt for a surge of new cases.*
- *Widespread testing and tracking is occurring.*

PHASE FOUR

Church Guidelines

- Gatherings of 50 or fewer are allowed.
- As able, continue offering virtual services for those who can't attend.
- Youth programs, church school, nursery, and pre-schools may reopen with Department of Public Health approved safety guidance.
- Return to all outreach ministries as long as in line with health guidance.



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Some final thoughts...

- Within the framework of the guidelines, leaders of congregations should ask: What makes sense for our congregation, in our context. There is no one size fits all.
- Pay attention to the public health trends and indicators in your own county/region.
- Following these guidelines and the guidelines of the State of Illinois as they pertain to your region helps mitigate liability. There is no absolute immunity from liability.
- Seek help and input when you need it.
- Remember, there is no perfect plan. Yours will evolve and change to adapt to new realities on the ground.

NB Liability is always a concern for all parishes, especially those with a 'deep pocket.'