

PHASED RETURN TO INCREASING IN-PERSON PARISH LIFE

for the Episcopal
Diocese of
Southern Ohio

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THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF OHIO



**The Diocese
of Southern Ohio**
Episcopalians in Connection

To the Episcopal Congregations in the State of Ohio,

Greetings.

Our two dioceses, Ohio and Southern Ohio, have long valued the spirit of collaboration and consultation that reflects our collective histories and our shared commitment to the common good. The COVID19 pandemic has once again brought that spirit to the fore, now evidenced by our working together to develop guidelines and directives for a physically regathered church.

Such conversation and consultation have been significantly enriched by renewed attention to our dependence on one another across the Episcopal church and beyond. As your bishops, we have benefitted during this crisis from meeting weekly with the other bishops of Province V, learning from our ecumenical partners in the Ohio Council of Churches, and collaborating with our Evangelical Lutheran Church of America counterparts, with whom we enjoy a formal relationship beginning to bear fruit in blended congregations rooted in both traditions. We give thanks for all these reminders that we are one body in Christ. We also wish to express our gratitude to Governor DeWine and Dr. Amy Acton for their leadership in guiding the people of Ohio as we try to bring this pandemic under control, and to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for its scientifically informed recommendations, which greatly benefit our governmental and ecclesial decision making.

We are writing to you at this time to let you know that we take very seriously our responsibility to support and protect the spiritual health

and physical safety of every congregation that is in communion with our respective diocesan conventions. This is not our responsibility alone, of course. It is a responsibility that is conferred on every Christian in Baptism, the exercise of which falls in particular ways on the elected lay leaders, deacons, and priests we choose to lead us in what it means to be the body of Christ. There are times, however, when our tradition, with its sometimes challenging and fruitful dispersion of authority, expects its bishops to offer clear directives. This is one of those times.

To that end, we seek to speak with one voice as we approach regathering physically in our places of worship. Our respective staffs have reviewed the current regulations of our Governor and the recommendations of CDC, understanding that such directives remain fluid and are changing almost daily. We respect and appreciate the authority of the state in all matters of public wellbeing, and acknowledge its responsibility to restrict our actions where wellness and safety are concerned. We also affirm that the church sometimes has the responsibility to surpass government expectations for resisting behaviors that jeopardize and harm the public, especially those who are most vulnerable. We envision the possibility that, as Episcopalians in Ohio, we may choose to restrict our physical presence to one another in worship, not only for the sake of our own safety, but for the safety of the neighbors who surround us. We view this as a moral imperative.

On that basis, we are expecting and requesting the following as required practices for worship, direct group church work (e.g., community meals, homeless support ministries), and independent but congregation-related ministries on-site E.g. (12-Step groups, Scout Troops, preschools):

- Social distancing
- Facial covering
- No singing
- Disinfection of all high-touch surfaces (including restrooms) after gatherings

The implementation of these basic requirements may be extended, or perhaps returned to in the future, at the discretion of each diocese, even if the state lifts certain restrictions.

Here it is important to note that differences of opinion are part of the Episcopal ethos, just as is the deep intention to be one body. That is one of the creative tensions at the heart of our tradition. Even now, as with regard to Eucharistic practice, there are theological and emotional issues to be acknowledged and worked out, which may be specific to our distinct and particular contexts. With that in mind, each diocese will provide an individual document outlining specific policies regarding regathering for worship and ministry in its congregations, with this cover letter attached. These protocols will be very similar in both structure and content, with likely only a few variances regarding liturgical practice and timing of implementation.

Please know that you are all in our prayers, as we trust we are in yours.

Faithfully in Christ,



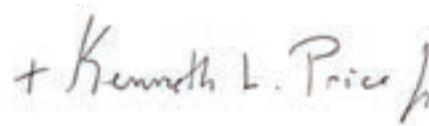
The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.
Bishop Ohio



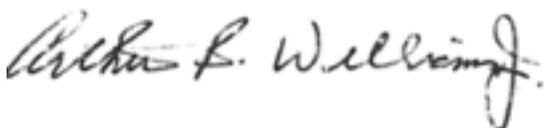
(The Rt. Rev.) Thomas E. Breidenthal, D. Phil.
Bishop Southern Ohio



The Rt. Rev. William D. Persell
Bishop of Chicago, Retired



The Rt. Rev. Kenneth L. Price
Bishop Suffragan of Southern Ohio, Retired



The Rt. Rev. Arthur B. Williams, Jr.
Bishop Suffragan of Ohio, Retired



The Rt. Rev. Bavi Rivera
Bishop of Eastern Oregon, Retired



Phased Return to Increasing In-person Parish Life

for the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio

The Coronavirus pandemic and its effects continue to impact communities across the world. As Christians, we have a deep desire to care for our people, our communities, and one another during these challenging times. Our churches have responded to the abrupt end to public worship and community gatherings with creativity, goodwill and compassion. It is now time to build on these practices as we look to reintroduce different stages of in-person gathering.

Our goals include:

- Offering hope to our communities in this uncertain time.
- Continuing to provide our people and communities with the best pastoral care, now and in the months to come.
- Providing continuity of prayer and worship, whether gathered in person or electronically.
- Protecting the most vulnerable by limiting contact and initiating practices to slow the spread of infectious disease.

This multi-phase plan contains practices for how Episcopalians in the Diocese of Southern Ohio can begin to regather in person.

Please note, this plan is subject to further recommendations from health officials and the governor of Ohio as more information and best practices become available. The way forward will not be immediate and may not be linear.

Subsequently, the shift between phases will be based on a reevaluation of the situation using the criteria laid out by Governor DeWine and public health officials. If conditions do not improve and infections increase again, physical distancing and prior health and safety practices would need to be reintroduced.

If there is an uptick in Coronavirus cases following an initial reentry, the possibility exists that our churches may default to an earlier phase which requires more social distancing and less (if any) gatherings in person for a time.

Since our ability to gather is dependent on the success of our state's reopening, we do not have definite dates associated with each phase. That said, we will let a faithful balance of direction from regional leaders, public health officials, good science and pastoral care guide our actions.

This plan contains the following:

- Phase One: Suspension of in-person worship (currently)
- Phase Two: Regathering in person
- Phase Three: Increasing participation
- Appendix A: Questions for the vestry
- Appendix B: Resources
- Appendix C: Conference notes

These guidelines articulate practices that fall into categories of requirements and recommendations:

- Requirements are mandatory, and are indicated by the phrases "must..." and "...are prohibited".
- Recommendations which are indicated by the phrase, "we advise", are best practices and may be modified as appropriate to your local context under the authority of the vestry and/or clergy leadership.

As we continue to follow guidelines for safety, please remember to pray for the ill and recovering, for the grieving and for the lonely. We pray for researchers, medical professionals, health policy experts, front line workers, and for those who clean and stock and ship. We pray for each other – that we may continue to be a people of hope in the midst of fear and uncertainty.

We recommend that your church leadership (including clergy, wardens, and vestry; those who hold the authority and responsibility for the buildings, financials and liturgical life of the church) work together to plan for reopening. (See Appendix A)

If you have questions about this plan, please contact the Bishop's office with any questions or clarifications.

Specifically:

The Rev. John Johanssen,
Canon to the Ordinary
jjohanssen@diosohio.org

- or -

Carine de Lange,
Operations Executive
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Phase One: Suspension of In-person Worship *(Current Status)*

Public Health Indicators

Rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths are rising

Church Building & Office Use Guidelines

Even though Governor DeWine's Stay-at-Home-Order has been lifted, staff members who are able to work from home should work from home.

In-building staffing must be minimal and on a drop-in basis as necessary to maintain essential operations (deposits, mail processing, etc.). Staff members must communicate to ensure that social distancing is always maintained. Common surfaces, including doorknobs, counter tops and office electronics must be disinfected before use.

Worship & Formation

- All congregations shall suspend services of public worship. We recommend that congregations find means of gathering using online tools for worship, formation and fellowship.
- Live streaming from inside a church building is permitted, with a minimum number of participants.
- "Drive-through" and "drive-in" worship is prohibited.
- "Virtual communion," in which a minister "blesses" bread and wine through a phone or online connection, is prohibited.

Outreach & Feeding Ministries

- Follow Ohio Department of Health guidelines on food preparation, i.e., wearing masks and gloves while preparing the meal: **coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/checklists/english-checklists/Safe-Food-Handling-COVID-19-Checklist**
- All meals are takeout only.
- Manage guest social distancing while waiting for and after receiving the meal.
- Clean kitchen and preparation spaces after each use, according to CDC guidelines.

Outside Groups

For groups that meet outside the regular worshipping community, (i.e., A.A., community groups, contractors, quilters etc.), follow the below guidelines:

- Group size smaller than ten people.
- Adhere to social distancing and facial covering requirements.
- Have a plan for how they will use and clean the building after use.

Recommendations for Gathering While Separated

- We advise continuing to offer opportunities to gather your community while physically separated using tools like video conferencing and social media for ongoing worship, formation, and fellowship.
- We advise identifying a method by which your leadership will continue to engage your non-online parishioners, whether by phone, training and assistance to get access online, or some other means.
- All pastoral care should be conducted by mail, telephone and other technology.

Weddings

If it is necessary to celebrate Holy Matrimony, we advise limiting participants to the priest, the intendeds and the two required witnesses. A subsequent celebration of the marriage may be held at a future date, if and when circumstances for such public worship allow.

Funerals

If interment is necessary, we advise a minimal number of immediate family be present for a graveside service, observing current norms of distancing. A memorial celebration of life may be held at a future date, if and when circumstances for such public worship allow.





Phase Two: Regathering in Person

Public Health Indicators

Rates of cases, hospitalizations and deaths are declining. Testing and tracing are available. Sufficient PPE (personal protective equipment) is available.

Please remember that many of our congregations are made up of individuals who fall into the category of a vulnerable population. Re-opening might not be appropriate for every congregation and that is ok.

Prior to reopening, please use the questions in Appendix A in conjunction with the guidance issued in this document and previous documents to develop your plan. Again, feel free to contact the Bishop's office if you have questions or need guidance.

Preparing Church Buildings for Regathering

- Before any public use of our church-owned spaces, congregations must deep clean and appropriately disinfect the entire church building, including, but not limited to: pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, stair railings and microphones. Please see Appendix B for current cleaning guidelines from the CDC.
- We advise the removal all non-essential items from rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.
- Remove bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc. from pews.
- Holy water stoups at the entrance or exit to a church should be removed from service, since these are commonly touched surfaces.
- Follow the Ohio Department of Health recommendations for water supply flushing for reopening of buildings: epa.ohio.gov/Portals/28/documents/pws/ODH-OhioEPABuilding-Owners-Occupants-Tenants.pdf
- We advise making announcements and posting signs about social distancing, maximum occupancy, hand washing, wearing of facial coverings, non-contact greetings, and refraining from shaking hands or hugging. Free posters can be found on the CDC website (refer to Appendix B).
- Advise the congregation before reopening about the preparations made for their re-entry and to reiterate that, if they do not feel well or are of a vulnerable population, they should stay home.

Offices & Building Administration Building Use Guidelines

- Congregations must follow all physical distancing and hygiene guidelines, including use of facial coverings. Please consider having a supply for those who arrive to your building without one.
- Buildings must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
- We advise posting signs outlining COVID symptoms and urging people to stay home and seek medical attention if experiencing symptoms or feeling unsafe.
- We advise maintaining appropriate stocks of bathroom tissue, soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectants and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
- We advise allowing building users/rental groups back in on the condition that they can observe gathering limits, physical distancing and hygiene protocols.
- We advise maintaining a visitor log (including phone numbers and email addresses) for all who enter the building. Recording names will enable the Health Department to more quickly trace, test and isolate individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19, if a person was infected at a time they attended a service or event. To the extent possible, the log should be managed by a person using another no-touch method.
- We advise creating an emergency plan to respond to additional outbreaks.

Office Guidelines

We support that staff members be permitted to work from home, should their work duties allow them to do so, especially those who are immunocompromised, parents of children, or those older than 65 years of age.

We advise keeping in-office functions as minimal as possible and continue to make use of Zoom and other options for meetings.

Any staff members working from church-owned buildings must continue to follow social distancing and sanitary guidelines, including:

- Conducting daily health assessments (can be a combination of employee self-evaluation and employer evaluation e.g., taking of temperatures).
- Wearing facial coverings.
- Maintaining six feet of separation between individuals or family groups.
- Maintaining good hygiene at all times, including regular handwashing and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) use.
- Regular disinfecting of common surfaces including doorknobs, phones, countertops, and office electronics.

Following the protocols issued by Governor DeWine for general office environments (Appendix B).



Worship Guidelines

Congregations may choose to offer small worship gatherings under these guidelines:

- It is recommended that you limit any in-person worship gatherings to no more than 50% of your fire code capacity while allowing six feet of total separation between households, whichever is fewer.
- Maintain online worship and formation opportunities for those unable to join in-person gatherings.
- Spread out the number of attendees in the building so that physical distancing is maintained.
- Consider multiple services with fewer attendees. Having people sign up for services in advance online, while allowing for a few new people to drop in.
- Create and assign fixed seating or roping off some pews to maintain safe distances. Households may sit together if at least six feet apart (i.e., 360°) from any others when gathered for in-person worship.
- Offer a service dedicated to those who are more vulnerable with even more extensive guidelines followed or held exclusively online.
- Consider holding services outside for better airflow and distancing.
- All common surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected; before and after worship, including doorknobs, counter tops, pews, electronic, and sacramental items.
- Flower and Altar Guilds should organize their work to observe physical distancing and protective protocols, i.e. facial coverings.
- Acolytes and other servers should observe physical distancing and protective protocols.



Requirements for Worship

- Under the social distancing guidelines, the administration of the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine is not safe. Until further notice, the celebration of the Eucharist in public gatherings is not permitted. The Daily Office (e.g., Morning or Evening Prayer, etc.) or the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Word through the Prayers of the People should be used. We will monitor this guideline frequently so that the celebration of Holy Eucharist can be commenced as soon as possible.
- Under social distancing directives, the exchange of the Peace must be without touch. Clergy and lay leaders should model a wave or a bow while staying in place.
- The practice of “passing the offering plate” is discouraged during this time. The offering plates should be placed visibly within the community gathered. In advance of worship, set the expectation of online giving or mailing checks. The Bishop’s office can assist in setting up online giving.
- Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading the virus. We advise refraining from singing when gathered in-person, including choir and congregational singing. The use of instrumental or recorded music is recommended.

Recommendations for Worship

- We advise removing prayer books, hymnals and Bibles from pew racks during this time. Worship services may be followed using single-use bulletins (that are handed out by a single usher who is wearing gloves), by sending a digital copy for people to access on their personal devices, or by use of screen and projection. People can be encouraged to bring their own Book of Common Prayer.
- To ensure social distancing as people exit, develop a plan for dismissing congregants in an orderly way.
- We advise that ushers remind participants about these guidelines and State of Ohio requirements.
- Develop a plan to reduce the number of doors that people must touch to enter your service, by employing door stops or greeters.
- We recommend against offering a fellowship/ coffee hour. Encourage people to leave the building rather than mingle. Give yourself permission to reintroduce coffee hour at a future date. Consider having a ZOOM coffee hour following the service.

Requirements for Special Services

- Rituals (weddings, funerals, baptism, confirmations) could take place in a more traditional way, with careful attention to guest lists so as to keep within physical distancing plans and facial coverings.
- It is recommended that fresh water be used for each person being baptized.
- Area confirmations will take place in consultation with the bishop’s office.



Nursery Care

Given the challenges of maintaining physical distancing in the care of young children in the nursery, it is recommended that this ministry be discontinued until further notice.

Children are always welcome to stay with their families during worship, as they are full members of the Body of Christ.

* Note that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children two years of age and under do not wear masks or face coverings.

Service & Outreach

- Pastoral care visits to those in high-risk categories for contracting the virus remains restricted, as do pastoral care visits by clergy and lay visitors in high-risk categories. However, clergy are now permitted to give Ministration at the Time of Death in hospitals.
- Care for the most vulnerable, engagement with those assessing the societal impact of the pandemic, and advocacy for justice may continue.
- Requirements for group size, physical distancing, sanitation, and use of facial coverings must be followed.
- We advise that distribution ministries limit time spent inside the building and allow for outside or curbside service.
- Any food distribution must be carry-out, or served by a person using gloves. Buffets are prohibited.
- Draft building use guidelines and have them signed by group leaders.

Requirements for Meeting Gathering & Outside Groups

- Limit events and meetings that require close contact. Most, if not all, meetings and formation opportunities should continue to take place online.
- Facial coverings are required to be worn by everyone. Please consider having a supply for those who arrive at your building without them.
- Bible studies, faith formation and small groups can meet in person with the required physical distancing, wearing facial coverings and cleaning protocols in place. However, maintaining some online options for high risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in the public is recommended.
- Allow building users/renters to resume occupancy of the building, provided that all building use guidelines are followed, including a plan to address cleaning needs and their agreement to observe gathering and distancing protocols and maximum group size.

Summer Programming

The Procter Camp and Conference Center will not hold summer camp this year.

Vacation Bible Schools (VBS)

All in-person summer programming, including VBS will not take place. While the risk to children appears to be somewhat lower, there is an ongoing risk of carrying the virus back home and sharing with other family members. We advise considering providing online VBS activities, and/or an activity packet that can be dropped off with no contact (leave on porches, send in a mailer, etc.)

Mission Trips

Mission trips are unwise at this time due to travel restrictions and the ongoing risks. This is an ideal time for mission in the local area. Practice the art of mission in place, support local food pantries or other community services in need of volunteers. Keep your groups small so not to overwhelm the ministries that you serve.



Phase Three: Increasing Participation

At this time it is impossible to know what appropriate guidelines for Phase III will be. The following notes are simply estimates of the appropriate protocols for the significant increase of in-gathering for worship and ministry. These guidelines will undoubtedly change before arriving at this phase.

One of the key public health indicators for re-gathering will be the development and distribution of a vaccine to the public. This will indicate that a treatment with proven effectiveness and testing for the virus is widely available. Widespread immunity would be present in the community.

Building Use Guidelines

- Events and in-person gatherings would be permitted. We advise making every provision to avoid crowding.
- In-person meetings would be permitted. We advise considering how you might enable your high-risk members to join your gathering digitally.
- Regular office operations would be permitted. We advise considering how you might maintain flexibility for staff members that are high-risk or have children unable to attend school or access childcare.
- Communal spaces must continue to be cleaned on a regular basis, including before and after gatherings.

Worship Guidelines

Worship gatherings of all sizes are permitted with the following guidelines:

- We advise maintaining an online/hybrid worship option for people that are high-risk and need to maintain stay-home precautions.
- Physical distancing is not required. We advise avoiding crowding in the sanctuary and other spaces to every extent possible. Consider offering multiple services to help people spread out.

- Congregations may continue the use of no-touch alternatives for the passing of the peace.
- Congregations may continue the use of no-touch alternatives for the offering.
- We advise setting aside special space within your worship area to be designated for people of vulnerable populations.
- Watch for public health recommendations on group singing as we arrive at this phase.
- Under the social distancing guidelines, the administration of the Eucharistic elements bread and wine is not safe. Until further notice, the celebration of the Eucharist in public gatherings is not permitted. The Daily Office (e.g., Morning or Evening Prayer, etc.) or the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Word through the Prayers of the People should be used. Bishop Breidenthal is in conversation with other Bishops regarding the theology of Eucharist, to continue to explore how we might move forward. Information will be shared as it is available.

Coffee hours would be permitted with the following guidelines:

- Congregations must make every provision to ensure adequate space to avoid crowding.
- Carefully think through the highest regard for food safety. If food and drink are served, please consult and follow safety guidelines for sharing food in public settings.

Appendix A: Questions for Consideration

by Vestry, Clergy, and Parish Staff

This plan was compiled in conversation with the bishops, staffs, and elected leadership of the Episcopal Dioceses in the state of Ohio, following current recommendations of the CDC, and with resources offered from the four Dioceses in Michigan all 14 Dioceses

of Province V, the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, the Dioceses of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Western New York, the Dioceses of Washington, Maryland, and Virginia, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

We offer this list of questions for your vestry to consider in consultation with your clergy and parish staff. When we enter Phases Two or Three, we recommend you work through these questions before deciding to re-open for in-person gathering.

- How will you maintain connection with those who cannot gather in-person, even when restrictions are lifted?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping with household groups sitting six feet apart?
- Is your clergy comfortable returning to in-person worship? What about your vestry and your congregation?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping in family groups sitting six feet apart in every direction?
- How will you manage safe congregating after worship services?
- How will you continue to be inviting and open to people that are not yet part of your community?
- What is your plan for sanitizing and disinfecting your communal spaces?
- How might your building use agreements need to be updated to reflect the new realities revealed by the pandemic?
- How will you maintain necessary stewardship for maintaining operations?
- What assets do you have (space, yard, volunteers) that might be used to respond in service to your community in light of the pandemic?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual, while remembering privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you conduct an intensive cleaning prior to its next use, as outlined by the CDC (Appendix B)?
- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

Appendix B: Resources

- Centers for Disease Control Vast Resource for COVID-19 Precautions & Suggestions: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
 - Cleaning your Facility: Guide for building cleaning: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html
 - Sanitizing Office Spaces: Guide for frequently used spaces: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html
 - Preparedness for Sacred Spaces: A set of best practices for religious institutions: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html
- The Diocese of Southern Ohio: diosohio.org
- AIHA Guidance for Worship Services and Religious Gatherings: aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Guidance-Documents/Reopening-Guidance-for-Worship-Services-and-Religious-Gatherings_GuidanceDocument.pdf
- National Coronavirus Response: A Road Map to Reopening: aei.org/research-products/report/national-coronavirus-response-a-road-map-to-reopening/
- Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors: centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf
- Guidelines for Opening Up America Again: whitehouse.gov/openingamerica
- Responsible ReStart Ohio: Resources: coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/responsible-restart-ohio/
- How to Protect Yourself from Coronavirus: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/
- NPR: CDC Issues Tools to Guide Reopening of Schools, Businesses, Transit: npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/14/856483424/cdc-issues-decision-tools-to-guide-reopening-of-schools-businesses-transit
- Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html
- Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2: epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2
- Decision tree for workplaces – posted 5/14: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/workplace-decision-tree.pdf
- Decision tree for youth programs and camps – posted 5/14: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/workplace-decision-tree.pdf
- Comprehensive article – Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting – posted 5/7: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/cleaning-disinfecting-decision-tool.html
- This is a 2 page decision tree: Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Decision Tool: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/ReOpening_America_Cleaning_Disinfection_Decision_Tool.pdf
- Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html
- Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf
- Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility (Recommended for churches): cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html



REOPENING FAITH COMMUNITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



The purpose of this tool is to assist leaders of faith communities in making decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to check with state and local health officials and other partners to determine the most appropriate actions. When completing the decision tree, consider that faith communities may also provide social, educational, and child care services at their facility.

Should you consider having in-person gatherings?

- ✓ Is the facility in a community no longer requiring significant mitigation?
- ✓ Will reopening be in compliance with state and local orders?
- ✓ Will you be ready to protect staff and congregants at higher risk for severe illness?

ANY NO



DO NOT OFFER IN-PERSON GATHERINGS

ALL YES



Are recommended safety actions in place?

- ✓ Promote healthy hygiene practices such as hand washing, wearing a cloth face covering
- ✓ Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation
- ✓ Ensure social distancing such as no large gatherings, increased spacing, avoid holding hands, offer additional, smaller services
- ✓ Limit sharing of items such as worship aids and collection trays
- ✓ Offer virtual services if possible
- ✓ Train all staff and congregants on safety actions

ANY NO



MEET SAFEGUARDS BEFORE OFFERING IN-PERSON GATHERINGS

ALL YES



Is ongoing monitoring in place?

- ✓ Encourage staff and congregants who are sick to stay home
- ✓ Plan for if staff or congregants get sick at facility
- ✓ Regularly communicate with local authorities, staff, and congregants
- ✓ Monitor staff absences and have flexible leave policies and practices
- ✓ Be ready to cancel in-person gatherings if there are increased cases

ANY NO



MEET SAFEGUARDS BEFORE OFFERING IN-PERSON GATHERINGS

ALL YES



OFFER IN-PERSON GATHERINGS AND MONITOR

Appendix C: Clergy Zoom Conference Notes

In a series of conversations held May 12 - 14, 2020 via Zoom, Bishop Breidenthal, along with Canon to the Ordinary John Johanssen and Operations Executive Carine de Lange, invited clergy and lay leaders into conversation to answer questions about the first document shared regarding the diocese's reopening planning guidelines. Highlights taken from each conversation have been compiled here for reference and are separated by topic.

Responses to questions were made by Bishop Breidenthal, Canon Johanssen, and Carine de Lange. Any responses given directly by the bishop are noted.

Guideline Development

The Diocese of Southern Ohio specifically Bishop Tom Breidenthal, the Rev. Canon John Johanssen, Carine de Lange, and Ann Sabo) is working closely with the Diocese of Ohio to develop a coordinated document on reopening guidelines that should be distributed later this month. That document will provide more details and principals specific to each diocese as we plan to gather again for worship. Both dioceses are taking their cues from the Governor of Ohio, so keep in mind that guidelines are changing rapidly and understand the fluidity with which we are working.

The first document sent was designed to get everyone thinking about what we will be addressing as we reopen and are still within the context of quarantine issues. The issues relating to social distancing, facial covering, etc. are still in effect, and it is our understanding that they will stay in effect until May 29.

There is some confusion as the Governor continues to open restaurants earlier than May 29. Our dioceses have chosen to be conservative about a reopening and regathering strategy. That means that online worship should continue and may now be conducted in the worship space following strict social distancing, mask, sanitization and no singing protocols.

Concerns for Older Population

- Many of our parishioners may be elderly or have afflictions that make them more susceptible to the virus.
- There seems to be a difference between what the Governor and CDC are advising. The CDC states not to open anything until there is a 14-day decline. Is the diocese considering the CDC recommendations or going with the governor?
- Many have stated they will not come back until there is an assurance of a cure or vaccine.
- Elected officials may be moving too quickly.
- With so many restrictions in place, why bother opening at all?
- Do we have permission to stay closed and offer services online only?
- What if we need to close again?

Response

There is no timeline set in the current guidelines. The decisions about reopening are meant to be left up to each individual congregation's leadership. The diocese is merely providing guidelines that may be helpful as you make your decision. The safety of your congregation is what is most important. If you follow the guidelines you will receive diocesan support on whatever timetable you decide to regather. The next document will have more clarification of requirements vs. suggestions and reopening guidelines will be laid out in phases. We have not yet addressed the possibility of re-closing.

Celebration of Eucharist

- Congregants are not happy they are not receiving Eucharist.
- Will there be a possibility of celebrating Eucharist over Zoom (National Cathedral does each week)?
- What about sealed bread and wine together? Or bringing your own bread to church?
- How will we administer Eucharist once we do reopen?

Response

The bishop has stated that he hears and understands the concern deeply. We have to take up the issue of the sacraments, but we can't rush into it. It is not only a spiritual concern but a public health concern.

Bishop Breidenthal:

I understand the hunger to return to the Eucharist in our church. You should not be surprised to hear that I am adamantly opposed to virtual communion. It completely undoes the meaning of the sacrament. It might be easier to see where I am coming from if you think about virtual baptism. The sacraments are grounded in physical presence and in matter. I understand the desire to be able to receive communion at a distance, but the long-term results would be theologically disastrous. My chief concern is for our long-term understanding of, and clarity about eucharist and baptism.

My approach is to not make any sudden moves in the middle of a crisis. It might be possible to move toward resumption of Eucharist in places that are really small. I haven't been able to come to a settled place on this, nor would I want to do that on my own.

Our hunger and longing for the sacraments is something I hope we do not forget. I don't want to rush into any easy or convenient ways to make it possible for us to feel normal again. I don't see this as my own decision, but as a discussion with the diocese as a whole, in concert with the rest of the Church."

Cleaning & Sanitizing

- Would like to know more about cleaning guidelines.
- Why do we need to remove all the books if we only have one service per week?
- Having trouble finding supplies.

Response

We will make available on our website resource page a list of cleaning services and groups that understand the guidelines. We are looking into companies that could give us a group discount rate. We are trying to create and maintain a current listing of suppliers that have stock.

If you are having trouble and have an immediate need, send a list to Carine de Lange at cdelange@diosohio.org and we will do what we can to help you get items.

Books must be removed because we don't know how long this virus survives on paper.

Technology

- Congregants are technology challenged or do not have the resources needed.
- Looking for suggestions on affordable equipment to purchase or live-streaming services to use.
- What can we do to help families over the summer?
- Online attendance decreasing.

Response

The bishop's staff is listing resources on the website and will continue to address any equipment and service questions.

Technology questions can be sent to **Tammie Vanoss at tvanoss@diosohio.org**

Outreach & Mission Programs

- Is there a place we can share what our congregations are doing and gather resources?
- 12-step groups are asking to come back. How can we make sure they are following guidelines?
- What should we do about rent for building tenants?

Response

Our website is a place to both share stories and gather resources. Please be in contact with the communications department at [**communication@diosohio.org**](mailto:communication@diosohio.org).

Clearly express your expectations. Groups, when physical distancing and wearing masks, can come back into the buildings as long as sanitation and other guidelines are followed. You may have your cleaning staff take it on themselves to ensure cleaning is being done correctly after meetings or come up with a check and balance system to ensure that proper cleaning is accomplished. If you think that is not happening, you may need to make arrangements to have it done before the next group uses the space. If possible, groups are encouraged to meet in the church courtyard or parking lot.

Most churches we have spoken with are forgiving rent during this crisis.

Office Reopening Protocols

- What information is available on inviting staff to come back to work?

Response

Follow the diocesan guidelines of wearing masks and physically distancing. More information will be sent out as it becomes available from Governor DeWine and the CDC.

Facial Coverings

- Can we remove our masks in the building?
- Is the use of a mask required on camera during a live stream?

Response

Our guidelines suggest the use of masks in general. If you are in the presence of another person, you should wear a mask to reduce the projection of droplets. If you are in your office or alone, a mask will not be necessary. If you are live streaming alone, you do not need a mask. The idea is to protect others. There are masks [with a clear front available so that the hearing impaired can see your mouth.

Singing In Church

- Is singing six feet apart with a mask permissible?
- Are there programs for synchronized singing in real time?

Response

Singing is one of the most dangerous ways to spread this virus because of the projection that comes from our voices and the distance the droplets fly. The amount of time that you are in the presence of others singing is also a concern. There should be no congregational singing at this time.

We are not aware of technology that allows for real time synchronization. The Cathedral is sending accompaniments to choir members: they listen with headphones and record themselves. They then send it to Stephan Casurella who mixes them together to create a virtual ensemble. Stephan uses Wavepad and Mixpad to put the different files together. These are available for free, and there are professional versions that are very inexpensive.

For more information on the program used, Stephan Casurella can be reached at [**scasurella@cccath.org**](mailto:scasurella@cccath.org).

Baptisms & Funerals

Special services can be conducted following safety guidelines: Wear masks and maintain physical distancing. Keep the service short, with no lingering. For baptism, you should administer the water using the safety guidelines. For funerals, a grave side service is preferable because of air circulation.

Confirmations & Visitations

- We have a visitation scheduled in the next few months.
- We have already started our confirmation program - should we hold off or continue?

Bishop Breidenthal Response

Don't hold off on confirmation preparation. I am intending to keep my visitation schedule as it is and am learning how to do virtual visitations. Virtual visitations cannot include confirmation but do include a sermon and some quality time with vestry and church leadership.

For confirmations and receptions, we all need to think together about having area confirmations that work for everybody and can be celebrations of our coming back together as a visible body. I don't intend for area confirmations to be a substitute for parish confirmations. Those are important, but it is good for the life of the diocese to have occasions when we gather to celebrate our life together. I am envisioning area confirmations as mini convocations, where we can have time for confirmations, but also time to share our stories about what we have gone through and what we have learned.



The church
never was the
BUILDING

The church
was always the
PEOPLE



**The Diocese
of Southern Ohio**
Episcopalians in Connection

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