

This is the Phase One Regathering plan for Grace Episcopal Church, Lexington, Virginia. The Vestry received and approved this plan at its meeting May 18, 2020.

In accordance with Diocese of Southwestern Virginia Regathering Guidelines, Regathering will begin after June 10. (See [Bishop Bourlakas Regathering Guideline](#))

It is important to note that Regathering will be phased and phases may not progress linearly, based on the state of containment in our area. Some restrictions are likely to remain in place until a vaccine or effective treatment is widely available. If case numbers increase in the local area we will follow the guidance of local public health officials to decide whether to step back a phase.

As of May 18 Virginia has authorized [Phase One guidelines for churches in Virginia](#) Requirements and best practices for Phase One Regathering for Houses of Worship in Virginia are printed at the end of this document.

### General Regathering Considerations

- The following restrictions are focused on Sunday Worship at Grace Episcopal. Additional guidelines will address other gatherings and how we will respond if and when students return to Washington and Lee and Virginia Military Institute.
- Most restrictions will remain in place through Phase One of regathering. Some restrictions, especially around singing and the common cup, may remain until an effective vaccine is widely available.

- During Phase One high-risk members are encouraged to stay home or attend a separate service provided for high risk members. Individuals older than age 65 and those with compromised immune systems or compromised lung and heart function should continue to attend worship virtually until testing and contact tracing are widely available. However, if they choose to attend these people are welcome within the following restrictions.
- Those who are sick or *caring for household members who are sick* must stay home, seek COVID-19 testing if appropriate, and return to public gatherings only according to [CDC protocols for quarantine and isolation](#). [CDC COVID-19 Symptoms-testing](#)
- If you are sick or caring for household members who are sick please alert Grace. We have special ministries and resources available to support you, including Front Porch Ministry, online worship and teaching, and most importantly, prayer.

### Phase One Restrictions at Grace

- During Phase One Congregants should bring and must wear face masks during the service to reduce their risk of asymptomatic spread.
- During Phase One Ushers greet people outside, remind them to observe 6' social distancing, and ask them to wear masks until testing and contact tracing are widely available.
- As long as social distancing is warranted, Ushers allow up to 34 families and individuals to sit in pre-marked seating 6-feet apart in the nave and another 7 in the balcony. (This capacity is calculated to ensure we stay inside occupancy guidelines and to ensure adequate spacing.)

- a. Family members from each household together.
  - b. Locations for seating are marked by dots on the appropriate pews.
- Because the handling of checks and cash introduces a risk, the practice of online giving is encouraged through Phase 1. A box (or plate or whatever) will be positioned at the entrance to the church for those who prefer to give in person.
- To minimize paper handling, the service bulletin will continue to be available electronically and can be printed at home or followed on a phone or I-Pad. Congregants may also pick up a full-text pre-printed bulletin from a basket at the front door. Prayer books and hymnals will not be available in the pews, but congregants may certainly bring their own.
- Hand sanitizer, tissues, and gloves are available at the church entrance.
- Because of the risk of transmission during singing, choir and congregational singing are suspended during Phase 1, but instrumental music will continue to be a feature of our services.
- There is no procession at the beginning and end of the service. The service begins with all participants in their seats.

- Congregants should remain in their places and avoid physical touching during the passing of the peace. At the eucharist, the bread only will be dispensed by the priest from the center aisle. Ushers will ensure that physical distancing is maintained between family groups and individuals as they come forward to receive the wafer. The common cup will not be used. Ushers will also direct congregants at the end of the service to ensure safe distancing during exit.
- To help us identify any possible contacts of a congregant who becomes ill with COVID-19, an usher will take a photograph of the seated congregation each Sunday morning during phase 1. This will allow us to identify people sitting in closest proximity to a person who becomes ill. These photographs will be retained for 3 weeks. Newcomers and visitors will need to leave us their contact information in case we need to reach them.
- During Phase One worship Church windows and doors are open during services. AC and Heat is not used during Phase One to reduce the circulation of stale air.
- Frequently touched surfaces- such as pews, chairs, tables, door knobs, and implements around the altar are cleaned immediately after the service by ushers and altar guild.
- A crisis management team is trained in new safety and crisis management plan protocols.
- Sunday School and other faith formation gatherings will continue on-line.

## Virginia Department of Health Requirements for Phase One Regathering for Houses of Worship:

Religious services must strictly adhere to the following requirements:

- Occupancy shall be limited to no more than 50% of the lowest occupancy load on the certificate of occupancy of the room or facility in which the religious services are conducted.
- Individuals attending religious services must be seated at least six feet apart at all times and must practice physical distancing at all times. Family members, as defined in Executive Order 61, Order of Public Health Emergency Three, may be seated together. Mark seating in six-foot increments.
- It is recommended that persons attending religious services be encouraged to wear face coverings over their nose and mouth at all times (See [CDC Use of Cloth Face Coverings guidance](#) for more detailed information.).
- No items must be passed to or between attendees who are not family members as defined in EO 61, Order of Public Health Emergency Three.
- Any items used to distribute food or beverages must be disposable and used only once and discarded.
- A thorough cleaning and disinfection of frequently contacted surfaces must be conducted prior to and following any religious services.
- Post signage at the entrance that states that no one with a fever or symptoms of COVID-19, or known exposure to a COVID-19 case in the prior 14 days, is permitted in the establishment.
- Post signage to provide public health reminders regarding social distancing, gatherings, options for high risk individuals, and staying home if sick (samples at the bottom of this document).
- If any place of worship cannot adhere to the above requirements, it must not conduct in-person services. Other suggested guidance for faith communities and funeral directors can be found below.

In addition to the requirements provided above, faith communities are encouraged to utilize the following best practices to the extent they are feasible:

- Designate a health coordinator and/or health equity team who will be responsible for COVID-19 planning and preparation for your place of worship.
- For the **building**:
  - Conduct thorough [cleaning](#) before and between services.
  - Use separate doors to enter and exit the establishment when possible.
  - Allow interior doors to remain open to limit touching of door handles.
  - Provide sanitizing stations throughout the building, particularly at entry and exit points.
  - Consider installing touchless door entry systems or providing single-use barriers (i.e., paper towels) for use in touching door and sink handles in bathroom facilities.
  - Use messaging boards or digital messaging and social media for announcements to eliminate use of bulletins and handouts.
- For weekly **religious services**:
  - Members are safer at home. Continue to provide and encourage use of online streaming and drive-in options for people who can utilize these options. No place of worship should feel obligated to return to in-person worship before they are ready to do so.
  - Consider holding multiple services, with time for thorough cleaning in between each service, to allow for greater distancing during services.
  - Suspend the choir as part of services.
  - Consider shorter services to avoid the need for people to use bathroom facilities.
  - Consider limiting or suspending youth services until a safer time.
  - Consider holding small group or separate services for [senior citizens and other high-risk populations](#)
    - Consider making this the first service of the week, after thorough cleaning and disinfection of facilities have been performed.
    - Ensure the use of face coverings and physical distancing is maintained between individuals at this service.
    - Ensure social distancing in parking lots or common areas.

- Consider discontinuing use of common items (e.g., microphones, books, hymnals, scriptural texts) that may be shared between people and are difficult to clean. Consider assigning religious books to a family or individual that they can bring to each service, or use a projector for the display of sacred texts, scriptures, and songs.
- When oils, water, ashes, or other materials are applied to a person's forehead, self-application should be used, to the extent possible.
- Discontinue shared meals and other activities where people may gather in groups (e.g., limit or suspend coffee stations, shared food, meet and greet time before and after services etc.), with the exception of essential food services for low-income residents.
- Possible methods for religious services:
  - **Drive-in/parking lot church:** This is the safer model of religious service where social distancing may be maintained.
  - **Sign-up worship services:** This will limit the number of live worship services. Ask members, visitors, or guests to sign up for one live service per month, or every other week (in Phase 1). If needed, members can take turns between online and in-person worship services during this interim time. Allow space for impromptu visitors by registering fewer people (for each worship or religious service) than the maximum allowed per the occupancy restrictions.
  - **Multiple gatherings during the week:** A place of worship may divide the number of congregants by the maximum occupancy level and offer worship services at that level. Consider adding online services, multiple services on one day, or alternative services during the week and/or on Saturdays and Sundays.
  - **Utilize multiple methods:** As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, most places of worship lost the ability to gather in-person, but many gained a stronger online presence. Consider nurturing both aspects for at-risk individuals, as well as for the increased capacity to reach and serve those outside of the walls of the faith organization.

- **Adult-only services:** This method asks parents of young children to alternate worship attendance (naturally reducing attendance, as one parent stays home with children).
- **Online-only:** Take this approach if you are in a high-risk area, your place of worship is not yet prepared with the conditions outlined in the state guidelines for opening, you or a member of your family has COVID-19 symptoms, or the governing authorities have requested additional measures in the interest of public health.