



EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
IN CONNECTICUT  
PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

# LIVING WITH COVID-19

Protocols and Directions for Clergy and Vestries in the  
Episcopal Church in Connecticut

## **Contents:**

**2** | Letter from our Bishops

**5** | General Protocols for a Gradual Return to In-person Worship

**7** | Directions for Parishes Considering In-Person Eucharistic Worship

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*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:1-5)*

## **Dear Companions in Christ:**

Grace to you and peace in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We write at an exciting time of possibility in our life together as the Body of Christ. With increasing access to vaccinations, a decrease in the incidence of COVID-19 infections, and the promise of warmer weather around the corner, it feels as if we are emerging from a long, difficult year of sickness and death. As we continue on our holy and penitential sojourn of Lent, we anticipate our upcoming walk with Jesus in Holy Week when he is heralded as King, betrayed, and crucified on the cross. We know and believe that on the other side of the cross is the good news of Christ's risen life in the resurrection. And so we yearn to shout the Easter morning Alleluias, freeing us from the death-dealing realities that we have experienced over the last year in the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and manifestations of racism, white supremacy and anti-Black bias.

Our intent in this third "Living with COVID-19" is to outline protocols and directions for parishes in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut as we slowly begin to return to in-person worship, both outdoors and indoors. The key word here is "slowly." The metaphor of turning a dimmer switch rather than suddenly flipping an on/off switch is often used to describe the reopening of our state. While the metaphor might be overused, we think it is apt to describe how we need to approach our return to in-person worship. Steps to in-person worship in our life together need to be incremental and measured; with all decisions based upon the best science available and always keeping in mind the standard of protecting the most vulnerable in our midst.

We have said it before, and it bears repeating. Our decisions regarding returning to in-person worship, whether outdoors or indoor, should be measured by how we care for the most vulnerable and those at the greatest risk among us. While Governor Lamont has plans to announce that on March 19th we can resume in-person, indoor worship without occupancy limits, that does not mean that we should necessarily return to such. We continue to urge you to take the utmost care in any steps you take to return to in-person worship always using care for those who are most at risk as our standard in our decisions.

And now a word again about who in a parish has the authority to make decisions regarding liturgical practices. Canon III.9.6(a)(1) of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church states that “The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, and the Constitution and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop.” We prefer the older language of the Canons that spoke of the bishops’ “godly counsel” rather than “pastoral direction.” In other words, the Rector/Priest-in-Charge has authority over the worship life of the parish, but this authority is always to be understood relationally in collaboration with the wardens and vestry and the godly counsel of the bishops.

As your bishops, our godly counsel (“pastoral direction”) remains as it has been for some time, namely that if your parish is in a town/city that continues to be in the red zone on the Connecticut [“Daily Data Report”](#) you should not have in-person worship. If your town/city is no longer in a red zone and you anticipate returning to in-person worship, we recommend outdoor worship as safer than indoor worship.

With the announcement that all residents of Connecticut will have access to one of the three COVID-19 vaccines by the beginning of May, we are heartened by the possibility of most of our parishioners being vaccinated in due course. To that end we encourage you to do all in your power to ensure that individuals in your care have access to a vaccination, especially in communities that have been historically underserved or excluded. [The Toolkit for COVID-19 Vaccinations](#), developed by the Office of Government Relations of The Episcopal Church, is an excellent resource for facilitating this important ministry of access to vaccines. While encouraging vaccinations is important, we do not believe that it is appropriate to require an individual to be vaccinated in order to participate in worship, in and when you decide to return to in-person worship. Strongly recommending and encouraging someone to get a vaccination is appropriate, while compelling someone to get vaccinated in order to participate in-person in the Body of Christ is not.

Current science emphasizes that the greatest risk to the spreading of COVID-19 comes from respiratory droplets and aerosols. That is why the wearing of masks at all times during any in-person worship needs to be stressed. In addition, six foot physical distancing, and sanitizing of hands and surfaces must be practiced. Because of the respiratory nature of the coronavirus, it is our pastoral direction that parishes continue to refrain from indoor choral music. Anyone displaying any symptoms of illness characteristic of COVID-19 should be encouraged to stay home and stay safe. These common sense precautions should be kept in place until Connecticut has achieved herd immunity.

The last year has indeed been a difficult and trying time for all, and the people and parishes of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut have not been exempt from the challenges of the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and manifestations of racism, white supremacy and anti-Black bias. Yet, through it all, we have found over and over that companions in Christ across ECCT have been of the same mind that was in Christ Jesus looking not to our own personal interests but to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-5) We thank God for your faithfulness and the love and care you have shown for your neighborhood and for your parish. We believe that on the other side of COVID-19 God will indeed have made of us a healthier, more adaptable, and more dynamic Body of Christ to serve God's mission of restoration and reconciliation. Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. (Ephesians 3:20-21.)

Faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas  
Bishop Diocesan



The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens  
Bishop Suffragan

## General Protocols for a Gradual Return to In-person Worship

- A conservative and careful approach that prioritizes the most vulnerable among us is the most compassionate, caring, and faithful response we can make to COVID-19.
- There is no compulsion to return to in-person worship. Clergy persons should not be criticized for choosing a more conservative approach to in-person worship.
- Parishes in towns/cities that continue to be in the red zone on the Connecticut "Daily Data Report" <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Data-Tracker> should not hold in-person worship, either outside or inside.
- Outdoor worship is much more preferable to indoor worship as indoor gatherings have a much higher risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Indoor worship spaces should do everything possible to increase the flow of fresh air throughout the space.
- When a parish begins to offer in-person worship, online worship should continue for those who are at higher-risk and cannot, or chose not to, attend in-person worship.
- Individuals experiencing any COVID-19 like symptoms should stay home and stay safe, and should not participate in in-person worship.
- All in-person worship should maintain COVID-19 safe practices including: the wearing of masks/face coverings at all times by all participants both congregants and worship leaders; maintenance of 6 foot physical distances between individuals and/or family/household "pods"; and sanitization of hands and surfaces.

- Until herd immunity is achieved in Connecticut, liturgies of Spiritual Communion, Morning Prayer, Ante Communion, and other services that do not distribute Holy Communion are preferred.
- Choral singing, especially indoors, is to be discouraged until herd immunity is achieved in Connecticut. Indoor worship may have a soloist as long as the soloist is fully masked at all times and at a significant distance from the congregants and worship leaders.
- In-person congregational gatherings should be limited to worship only until herd immunity is achieved in Connecticut. Educational offerings, coffee hours, and social gatherings should not be held in-person until herd immunity has been achieved.

## Directions for Parishes Considering In-Person Eucharistic Worship

- General Directions:

- Directions for Holy Eucharist with the reception of Communion are intended for services held inside a building. The general trajectory of these directions is recommended for outside worship as well.
- If the Holy Eucharist includes the reception of Communion, only bread should be received, noting that reception of one kind is full participation in the Holy Eucharist.
- When offering Communion, care should be taken so that those who choose not to receive do not feel excluded or uncomfortable.
- There should be clear paths established for the flow of congregants to/from pews so as to minimize close proximity of congregants at all times. Ushers should be instructed as to how to facilitate 6 foot physical distancing.
- There should be no physical touching during the Exchange of the Peace or at any other time in the liturgy, except for individuals in family/household "pods."

- Setting up for the Service:

- There should only be one identified Altar Guild person who should follow all COVID-19 safety practices when setting for the Holy Eucharist.
- Wafers, in original sealed packages, are to be used and not whole bread or communion wafers from open packages.

- The Offertory:

- Offerings are not processed forward, neither bread or money.
- On-line giving is encouraged. Locations to receive offerings should be located near the doors.
- Generally speaking, the Celebrant is the only person in the sanctuary space, and will themselves set the altar and turn the pages of the Altar Book. Six foot distancing should be maintained at all times.
- Only the Celebrant may touch the vessel/altar furnishings.
- All Communion vessels/altar furnishings need to be appropriately sanitized after the service.

- The Great Thanksgiving and Breaking of the Bread:
  - The Celebrant uses a mask throughout the service and especially during the service of The Holy Communion, from entering the sanctuary, throughout the distribution of Communion, and through the Postcommunion Prayer. Double masking is encouraged.
  - The Celebrant should sanitize her/his hands both before the Eucharistic Prayer and before, during, and after the distribution of Communion.
  - The wafers, paten, and cup should be covered by a fair linen or corporal throughout the Eucharistic Prayer. The paten and cup are only to be uncovered for the elevation.
  - A priest's host may be used for the fraction and the Celebrant should lay aside the priest's host after the Eucharistic Prayer. The priest's host should not be used in the distribution of Communion.
  - For pastoral reasons, the Celebrant should consider refraining from reception of the wine to be in solidarity with the congregation who should not receive the wine from the common cup.
- The Distribution:
  - The Celebrant only will distribute the bread at the time of Communion.
  - The Celebrant will sanitize their hands prior to, during, and after the distribution of the bread.
  - The church will be clearly marked to show the direction of flow for approaching and leaving the altar to maintain 6 foot physical distancing at all times.
  - The Communion line should clearly delineate 6 foot markers/resting places for physical distancing.
  - Ushers should help instruct the flow of communicants and also assist in maintaining 6 foot physical distancing.
  - The Celebrant should announce the words "The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven" or "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life." keeping a distance of 6 feet from the communicant.
  - Communicants are asked to receive the wafer standing in front of the priest. No kneeling or touching the altar rail.

- The Celebrant will drop the wafer into the open hands of the communicant, being careful not to touch those receiving Communion. If the priest touches the communicant by accident, the priest should re-sanitize their hands.
- The communicant receives the wafer in open hands and waits to consume the bread once they have returned to their pew, and can briefly remove their mask to do so. The communicant returns to their pew by a different path than that used to approach the altar, maintaining 6 foot distancing at all times.
- After the Service:
  - No sacrament is to be reserved following the service.
  - No home Communion or Communion outside of the worship space.
  - One identified Altar Guild member is to clear the communion vessels after the service following COVID-19 safety practices at all times.
  - Worshippers are to remain masked and need to maintain 6 foot physical distances until off of the parish's property. No congregants are to gather in the church or outside the building at the conclusion of the service.