



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CHICAGO

# A NEW SEASON

Guidelines for Re-Entering  
Our Church Buildings

VERSION 4 | MAY 5, 2021

**These updated guidelines effective May 5, 2021, supersede other guidelines issued by the Diocese of Chicago and its COVID-19 response team. They are informed by the most recent guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and state and local public health officials.**

No set of guidelines can anticipate every potential scenario or question. These guidelines serve as guardrails and establish maximum limits and expectations for a variety of church-related services and activities. As you review how to implement them in your congregation, it is important to consider your context, the size of your space, ventilation, and the possible mixed vaccination status of your congregation. There is clear evidence that the risk of COVID-19 is heightened by increasing the number of people in a closed space. This risk, however, is mitigated by the number of vaccinated people present and the continued wearing of masks and physical distancing. As congregations continue to plan for and begin regathering in person, the bishop's staff remains available for consultation and support.

## **WORSHIP SERVICES**

- Continue to provide meaningful online worship and fellowship opportunities for people at home. Continue to experiment with “hybrid church” in your context.
- For indoor and outdoor services, clergy, liturgical leaders and congregants must wear face masks, *regardless of vaccination status*, throughout the service except when preaching or reading. When preaching or reading, fully vaccinated people may remove their masks as long as they are at least 6 feet away from any other person. Unvaccinated persons must still wear masks when reading or preaching.

## **Capacity**

*Indoor services: (based on State of Illinois and City of Chicago guidelines as of 4/29/21)*

- For all of Illinois, churches with capacity of less than 200: 50% capacity, but with a cap of 50 people
- For all of Illinois, churches with capacity of more than 200: 25% of capacity
- As you determine the number of people your church can accommodate, please keep in mind how 6 feet of distance between individuals and household groups will be maintained.

*Outdoor services*

- No limit as long as physical distancing of 6 feet between individuals and household groups can be maintained.



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### *Drive-in Services*

- Members remain in their vehicles, maintain distance between cars of at least 6 feet.

If holding in-person worship, please adhere to the guidelines below:

- Greetings and Passing of the Peace remain touch-free with maintenance of physical distance.
- Prayer books and hymnals may remain in the pews, and reusable paper bulletins may be used from week to week. If using reusable paper bulletins for worship on the same day, use a different set for each service.
- Avoid passing a collection plate and offer stationary collection boxes for offerings. Continue online giving options.
- Keep church doors open as able to allow for air flow and ventilation. Consult with your heating and cooling professionals to adjust your systems where possible.
- [New understanding of viral transmission](#) shows that standard cleaning efforts are sufficient.

### **MUSIC**

- A choir of no more than four fully vaccinated people may sing together at an **indoor worship service**, with all singers wearing a well-fitting mask, and distanced at least 6 feet from any other person. The choir should be at least 15 feet away from members of the congregation.
- Outdoors, no more than 15 people, regardless of vaccine status, may rehearse and sing together as a choir, so long as all are masked and distanced at least 6 feet away from any other person.
- A choir of fully vaccinated masked singers may rehearse and record in an empty, well-ventilated church as long as all singers maintain 6 feet distance from one another.
- Vaccinated brass and woodwind instrumentalists with face masks and appropriate coverings for the bell of the instrument may play indoors or outdoors as long as 6 feet distance is maintained. Other instrumentalists, for example, string and percussion, must be masked and remain 6 feet apart. It is strongly recommended that these instrumentalists also be fully vaccinated.
- Congregants can feel free to hum along with any music.

### **FOR CELEBRATIONS OF THE EUCHARIST**

#### **Guidelines for deacons setting the table, or for priests in the absence of a deacon**

- Prior to setting the table, the deacon should conspicuously use hand sanitizer to clean their hands prior to touching any of the elements and distributing communion.



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- Use hosts instead of homemade bread.
- The deacon may pour the wine into the chalice.
- After setting the table, the deacon may reverence the table if that is the practice, and then step to be at least 6 feet away from the priest.
- The deacon should not return to the table to elevate the chalice. All must wear masks regardless of vaccination status.

### Guidelines for priests celebrating the Eucharist

- Only have the presider host directly in front of you during consecration. Have hosts for congregants to the side and consider covering the elements being consecrated.
- Think through how you will minimize person-to-person contact for administering the sacrament; how you will sanitize and resanitize before and while administering the sacrament; and how you will orchestrate your movements. Please remember that according to the Book of Common Prayer rubrics, consecration can be accomplished with a minimum of gestures and touching of elements.
- Create directional signage and instructions for how to receive communion.
- Communicants should receive the host while still wearing a mask and consume the host as they return to their seats.
- Priests may consecrate a flagon of wine and pour it into individual cups to distribute to congregants. Have other clergy or lay Eucharistic ministers at stations with cups at least 6 feet from where communion bread is distributed. Communicants should receive the cup and move away before consuming. Set up clear directional signs and instructions for how to receive communion wine.

### CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

- The service of Baptism should proceed as normal, following the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer.
- While administering the rite, masking protocols should be followed and distancing maintained when possible.

### CELEBRATIONS OF WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

- Weddings and funerals may be held in the church as long as appropriate state and local guidelines regarding attendance are followed
- All guidelines pertaining to worship, listed above, are to be maintained. If a reception or other event is to follow, state and local guidance must be observed.

### OTHER PROGRAMS



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- Youth programs, church school, Christian formation programs, vacation bible school, mission trips and other programs may take place outdoors or indoors with appropriate masking, distancing, ventilation, etc. and in compliance with any state or local guidelines. All adult leaders must be fully vaccinated.
- As you prepare for the reopening of programs, especially those involving children and youth, please review and determine how you will implement recommended health screenings for participants. It is also important to develop guidelines for notifying participants if someone in your program reports having or being in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.
- Useful guidelines for these types of programs are provided by the [CDC](#) and [Illinois Department of Public Health](#).
- Nurseries may reopen following [CDC guidance](#) for daycare providers. All adult caregivers must be fully vaccinated.

### COFFEE HOUR AND OTHER MEALS

- The preferred and safest option for fellowship and sharing of food is outdoors.
- Any food available should be individually wrapped.
- If beverages are available, they should be pre-poured into individual cups with individually packaged creamers/sweeteners for coffee or tea available at a separate table.
- Masks are required when not eating or drinking, and physical distancing is required at all times.
- Meals ministries or community meals can take place with no more than 6 people at tables spaced at least 6 feet apart. Outdoor environments are safer. Indoor meals must observe all restrictions on gathering size and be held in rooms with adequate ventilation. No self-serve or buffet style meals are allowed. Masks are required except when eating. These [City of Chicago guidelines](#) are useful for congregations throughout the diocese.

### WELCOMING BACK COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Community groups that meet on your church campus may return as long as they agree to follow these guidelines and any additional guidelines set by the State of Illinois Department of Public Health for groups such as daycare and schools.

### RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

- If staff has not returned to work in the office, now is the time to begin planning for that return.



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- [This guidance from the CDC](#) offers useful tools and information for returning to workplace.
- It is important to be attentive to the range of feelings and concerns your staff might experience in returning to the office.
- Mask wearing and physical distancing guidelines are important, especially when meeting with visitors and while working together in public spaces.
- Anna Stefaniak, the diocese's associate for human resources, is available for consultation on issues related to returning to offices. Email her at [astefaniak@episcopalchicago.org](mailto:astefaniak@episcopalchicago.org).

# EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CHICAGO

St. James Commons  
65 E. Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
(312) 751-4200