The Episcopal Diocese of Maine

May 2020

An Initial Approach to Regathering
From the Bishop

Dear Clergy and Lay Leaders,

Grace and peace to you in the risen life of Jesus Christ.

Now that Governor Mills has announced a plan for gradually reopening Maine, I'm sharing a resource to guide your thoughts, plans, decisions, and communications as you "re-open" your congregation. This will be the first of what I think will be a 12-18 month process of planning and changing.

Though January and February are only a few months behind us, they might as well be thought of as an end of an era. The world around us has changed. We are changed. If we think of the next couple months as simply resuming what we did earlier this year, we will be disappointed. God calls us to give thanks for what was and to move forward in trust and gentleness, proclaiming the promise found in the Letter to the Hebrews, "Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:9).

Remember that the church is always changing, and just because this particular change happened quickly doesn't mean we are without resources. In fact, we are rich with faith, intellect, and something else that is precious: our relationships. The Diocese of Maine, like the State of Maine, is blessed by a strong sense of community. We look out for one another, and what's happening in one part of our diocese matters to every other part. This spirit of connection and cohesion springs from our relationships.

I encourage you to think about relationships: How might they flourish in your congregation, in your local communities, and throughout our diocesan community? How can we on the diocesan staff come alongside you to help you discover and cultivate new relationships? We are eager to listen, to explore, and to serve.

You—clergy and congregations, Camp Bishopswood, our Jubilee Centers, our summer chapels, and governing bodies—you have risen with Christ to meet the challenge of the past two months with beautiful grace and courage. We are showing our neighbors, and one another, the truth that Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today, and forever.

The Right Reverend Thomas J. Brown, Bishop of Maine
About This Document

This document is the Episcopal Diocese of Maine’s incorporation of several external resources (noted throughout). It also reflects our community’s “chats” during our Town Hall meetings, diocesan staff meetings, discussions between the Bishop and the Executive Committee of Diocesan Council, as well as between the Bishop and the Standing Committee. In addition to our work within the Diocese of Maine, this resource integrates advice from Centers for Disease Control (federal and state), Johns Hopkins University, the Maine Council of Churches, the Church Insurance Company, the House of Bishops, and Episcopal Relief & Development.

This planning document includes a guiding theological principle and a suggested a timeline. To begin, in May we suggest working through the questions posed in this document (and questions you are considering specific to your community) and then communicating the decisions you will implement in June and July. Be fluid; things will shift.

If you need clarification on the recommendations, decisions, and questions in this guide, please contact diocesan staff. We want to help and come alongside you during this challenging time.

We anticipate that we will revise and reissue this planning document on a monthly basis.
Guiding Theological Principle

God has a mission, and the church is called to engage it: the Episcopal Diocese of Maine is called to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Therefore we will:

- Rely on the gospel values of trust, reciprocity, and gentleness
- Remain open to ongoing discernment and prayer
- Care for our most vulnerable parishioners by cautiously re-opening our buildings and resuming gatherings
- Comply with all laws and Governor Mills’ and Dr. Shah’s directives
- Continue whatever it takes to minimize a second wave of infection and death
May

Under state directive, Maine is under a Stay Safer at Home Order until May 31st.

This is a month for planning, listening, and communicating how things will be different after June 1st.

Please think through the following questions and lean on diocesan staff for support; we are happy to consult one-on-one with you.

Ministries that address food insecurity or replenishing the state's blood supply may continue during the month of May.
Questions for Church Leaders to Consider

- With those in high-risk categories likely continuing to stay at home, how will you reach them and serve them during this time?

- Will you maintain an online streaming option once you are back together worshiping in physical space? How will that need to adjust when there is also in-person worship happening?

- Is your clergy comfortable returning to in-person worship?

- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshiping in family groups sitting 6 feet apart?

- Is there value in postponing Holy Communion? Consider Morning Prayer for the month of June especially if the safety measures required for celebrating the Holy Eucharist will be too much for your congregation to manage right now.

- How will you cap attendance at events so there is room for members of the community to join you and so you don’t go over guidelines?

- Will services need a reservation list and more logistical coordination? Who does that?

- Can you continue small group gatherings online?

- Can you update your building use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
Questions for Church Leaders to Consider (Continued)

- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection of your physical plant?
  - Worship bulletin disposal, prayer books, etc.
  - Areas where small groups gather during the week
  - Nurseries and/or playgrounds
  - Pews or chairs following worship
  - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in your building

- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual while still maintaining privacy and pastoral care?

- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?

- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

- How will you pastorally deal with people acting out or ignoring protocol?

- How will you prepare your congregation in the event we experience a second wave and need to temporarily return to more assertive forms of distancing?
June & July 2020
Recommendations

- High-risk individuals, whether staff, volunteers, parishioners, or program participants should continue to shelter in place.

- Churches with the resources to do so should continue using technology for online worship and meetings.

- It is appropriate to record worship from inside your church while maintaining appropriate physical distancing (6 feet, and more than 6 feet for people who are singing), and for all people to wear masks.*

- Governance and program committees of fewer than 10 people might consider meeting in person while wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing or continue to gather online.

- Consider continuing to gather online for Bible studies and small groups; any in-person groups should be limited to 10 or fewer people and all people will wear masks.

- All levels of church leadership need to lead with knowledge and information to help our people cope with the changing nature of the phased community approach our health leaders will be taking.

*The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.
Recommendations (Continued)

- Churches with out-of-state visitors and summer chapels need to consider the Governor's mandated quarantine of all people entering Maine for a period of 14 days.

- Now is a time to renew relationships through small groups, including through continued use of Zoom and other online platforms. Leverage the work you have done in the past two months for mission in the community.

- In-person Vacation Bible School is not a good idea this year and mission trips are inadvisable. Connecting with food pantries or other services (there are new opportunities right now) might be a great alternative.

- Drive-in worship may require immediate action and diminish your capacity to prepare for in-person worship. Drive-in worship services are not recommended.
Decisions: Worship

- In-person worship services with fewer than 50 people are permitted, however, the following must be put into place and considered:
  - If your Sunday attendance is more than 50, plan for overflow contingencies and think through the possibilities of increasing the number of services, as well as reservation and tickets. We can help you!
  - All people should wear masks. Consider how you can provide masks to people who forget, or who don’t want to wear one. We can help you!
  - Physical distancing remains (6 feet)
  - Determine an alternative to passing the offertory plates. Think through the options for a central basket; if you have electronic and text-to-give programs continue and encourage their use.
  - The Peace: physical contact is not permitted. Consider inviting people to bow to one another, or trust that this entire aspect of the liturgy is accomplished by saying the versicle and response.
  - Worship leaders cannot greet people at the back of the nave with hand-shaking and hugging; consider what this means and how connections can still occur.
  - Please drain and sanitize all holy water stoops and baptismal fonts.
  - If you have a coffee hour, carefully think through the highest regard for food safety. Give yourself permission to re-introduce coffee hour later in the season.
  - Is there a way to avoid entirely, or to limit, distribution of printed worship material (leaflets, bulletins, etc.)?
  - If outdoor worship is offered, including the use of a tent, please continue to follow the guidelines outlined in this document.
Decisions: Holy Eucharist

If Holy Eucharist is celebrated, the following must be addressed:

- Plan on administering consecrated bread only.

- Intinction (partly dipping the consecrated bread into the consecrated wine before consumption) is not permitted.

- Use a chalice for the Eucharistic prayer but nobody should drink from it; consecrated wine can be reverently disposed of after the liturgy.

- Think through how to sanitize and re-sanitize while you administer the sacrament and how you will orchestrate your movements. This will vary for each congregation and space. Consider how persons can approach one at a time and return to their seat without getting too close to others.

- Consult with a medical professional about using gloves; public health experts have suggested that what they’ve seen in some religious settings is not appropriate “glove technique.”
Decisions: Music

Singing has been identified by the Centers for Disease Control as a particular concern for spreading the infection.

- Consider a cantor or a duet spaced appropriately instead of choirs.

- Can the worshipping assembly resume congregational singing later in the season?

Decisions: Funerals & Weddings

- Life rituals (weddings and funerals) can occur while adhering to the 50 person limit and continuing physical distancing plans.

- For both worship and life rituals gatherings, consider gathering contact information from all attendees. Recording names will enable the Health Department to more quickly trace, test, and isolate individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if an attendee had the virus at the time they frequented the service or event.
Decisions: Building Use

- Continue to work with property committees and vestries in maintaining and securing your buildings and grounds.

- Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.

- Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.

- Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.

- If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, put your communication plan into action, and cooperate fully with contact tracers.

- Consider the office functions: limit the number of people who gather, discourage visitors; ensure that everybody wears a mask, and that all surfaces, including the phones, are regularly sanitized.

- Allowing building users/renters back in (music lessons, 12-step communities of fewer than 50 people) if they are able to observe gathering limits, distancing protocols, and mask use, and you are able to accommodate the cleaning needs.
Additional Resources

We recommend the following resources:

- **Badger Bounce Back**, WI Department of Health Services.
- **Why Getting the US Back to Normal in the Next Couple Months is a Fantasy**, PBS NewsHour, April 20, 2020.
- **Church in these “VUCA” Times**, Jake Morrill.
- **24 Questions Your Church Should Ask Before People Return**, Ken Braddy, Jr.
- **The Four Spaces of Belonging**.
- **Leaders, It’s Time to Ask Critical Questions About the Post-COVID19 Church**, John Thornburg, United Methodist Insight, April 14, 2020.
- **Distributed Church**, Fresh Expressions.
- **How to Seize this Moment for Your Church**, Ed Stetzer.
- **Reopening a Business After the Coronavirus Shutdown**, Neckerman Insurance Services.
- **Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility**.
- **Ten Steps All Workplaces Can Take to Reduce Risk of Exposure to Coronavirus**, OSHA