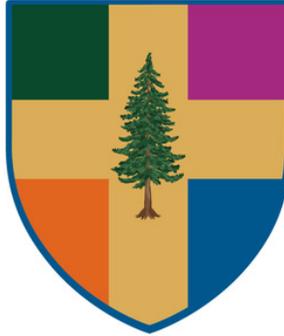


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April 2021

# *Regathering Guide*





## From the Bishop

Dear Friends in Christ -

Last March when we were at the beginning of this pandemic and on the cusp of lockdown, none of us could have predicted what the next year would bring. It's a welcome change that as we pass the March anniversary of the onset of the pandemic in Maine we begin conversations about reopening our churches. You have responded beautifully and lovingly to these changes, and I stand in awe of your faithfulness.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for reopening. The final decisions regarding how your church will worship are in the hands of the clergy and lay leaders of each parish. I trust you to know your circumstances and context, and to make loving decisions for the safety and spiritual nurture of your people, and that of your neighbors and wider community.

As we move towards reopening, it's imperative for all of us to exercise caution and to adhere to the guidelines and mandates provided by Governor Mills and the Maine CDC, including physical distancing and mask wearing. Consider how you may gently work with church members who are resistant to adhering to those mandates.

As you plan, remember that there will be members who won't come back to the church building at this time. Please ensure they do not feel left behind - continue hybrid worship whether by Zoom, livestreaming, or broadcast, to serve those who cannot yet come back to church.

We have included in this document some directives and lists of recommended practices. If you have questions as you discuss reopening with your clergy and lay leaders, reach out to the diocesan COVID advisory team; they're available to help.

Faithfully in Christ.

The Right Reverend Thomas J. Brown, Bishop of Maine



## Directives

- Comply with all state guidelines and executive orders
- Require face-coverings
- Refrain from congregational singing
- Implement physical distancing
- Record attendance
- When celebrating the Holy Eucharist administer the consecrated bread only
- Do not re-institute coffee hour or heavy building use (large gatherings, rentals) at this time. Pre- and post-service gatherings for fellowship and refreshments should not happen.

## Recommendations

- If it's feasible, consider taking temperatures
- Consider an in-person gathering one Sunday, and then return to online or broadcast worship the following Sunday. This staggered approach would provide more time to adjust practices, while also signaling the possibility that we may have to resume online or broadcast only worship if there's a change in the infection and positivity rates.
- The congregation should be encouraged to disperse after the service. The usual after service mingling should not take place.
- Continue using technology for online worship and meetings to meet the needs of those not yet vaccinated, wary of gathering, or homebound.

## Get Support

We are here for support - ask for help!

To reach the COVID advisory team with questions, email [covid-advisory-team@episcopalmaine.net](mailto:covid-advisory-team@episcopalmaine.net).



# More Details to Assist in Your Preparations

## Outdoor Worship

As we move into spring, outdoor worship becomes more feasible and preferable to indoor worship when the weather is conducive to comfortably meeting outdoors.

- If your outdoor space is small, use an online reservation system to ensure attendance does not exceed capacity and plan in advance to manage those who show up without reservations.
- Consider the number of worship services you will need in order to keep under capacity; space out services to prevent those leaving one service from interacting with those arriving for the next.
- Mark spots on the ground showing where people may stand in order to maintain safe distance. Immediate family groups may stand together (up to 4 members is suggested).
- Consider having chairs on hand for those who may need to sit during worship services, or ask attendees to bring them from home. If they are church-provided chairs, fully sanitize after each use.
- Have extra masks and hand sanitizer available.
- Encourage members to download the bulletin to a smart device before the service.
- Limit or eliminate distribution of printed materials, and do not use prayer books or hymnals.
- Consider an amplification system in order for a socially distanced congregation to hear.



## Indoor Worship

- Comply with all state guidelines and executive orders regarding indoor worship gatherings.
- 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!
- Ensure that ordered entry, seating, movement for communion, and exit is maintained
- All people should wear masks. Consider how you can provide masks to people who forget, or who don't want to wear one.
- 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.
- Drain and sanitize all holy water stoops and baptismal fonts.
- Have extra masks and hand sanitizer available.
- Encourage members to download the bulletin to a smart device before the service.
- Limit or eliminate distribution of printed materials, and do not use prayer books or hymnals.



## Funerals, Weddings, Baptisms

Life rituals (weddings and funerals) can occur but must adhere to the all state guidelines and executive orders.

Consider gathering contact information from all attendees to assist in contact tracing, if necessary.

Baptism will require special precautions:

- Only one candidate should be baptized at a given service.
- The font should be emptied and disinfected before any subsequent baptism service.
- The presiding priest should wear a mask and clean gloves.
- It's preferable that the child be held by their parents at all times, minimizing contact between the minister and candidate.

## Sunday School and Youth Gatherings

Sunday School and junior church gatherings must adhere to all state guidelines and executive orders for gatherings of children in schools and day care centers.

Leaders of these events will need to be appropriately briefed on how to ensure distancing between children and more leaders than normal may be required.



## Building Use

- Require use of masks while inside and while entering and exiting church buildings.
- 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.
- It may be appropriate to air the building by opening a window(s) ahead of the service.
- Set HVAC systems to introduce fresh air and/or open windows and doors to encourage fresh air over recycled air.
- 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.
- You may allow building users/renters back in (music lessons, 12-step communities of fewer than 50 people) if they will comply with all state guidelines and executive orders, observe gathering limits, distancing protocols, and mask use, and you are able to accommodate the cleaning needs.

## Cleaning Practices

- Cleaning and disinfecting of all touchable surfaces (including restrooms) must be done prior to and following each use.
- Particular attention should be given to cleaning vessels, shared vestments and cloths used in the service.
- Signage directing people to wash hands is encouraged. [This link](#) from the CDC provides printable resources to post in your buildings.
- [This link](#) from the CDC provides information on acceptable cleaning products and methods.



# Questions for Clergy and Lay Leaders to Consider

Please use the following questions to help you think through your plan for a safe reopening for public worship.

- How will you continue to reach and serve those who will continue to stay at home?
- How are you planning ahead to maintain an online streaming option once you are back together worshipping in physical space?
- Is your clergy comfortable returning to in-person worship?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are adhering to all state guidelines and executive orders?
- Consider the safety measures required for celebrating the Holy Eucharist, and whether those measures will be too much for your congregation to manage.
- How will you control 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 manages that process?
- Can you continue small group gatherings online?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection of your physical plant?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- 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?
- How are you communicating your reopening plans and safety guidelines to your congregation?
- How will you pastorally deal with people acting out or ignoring protocol?