

## Grace Episcopal Church

### Reopening Protocols: Safety, Seating and Holy Communion

#### What Will be Required During Services

In addition to this packet of protocols you have received, there will also be signs at every door at Grace Church, reminding you of the safety protocols that we will be enacting during worship services. The signs will remind you of who should not be attending church and what protocols to follow at church. You can refer to the CDC information sheet in this packet, but we will also walk through them here in detail so that no one is uninformed as to how we plan to proceed as a safe worshipping community in the time to come.

#### Who Should Not Attend Church and High Risk Groups

The guidelines for who should not attend any large gatherings, including church, is shared by health officials on local, state, and national levels.

**ANYONE who has ANY** symptoms of a cold/flu/virus...coughing, sore throat, fever, rash, etc, or has been in direct contact with someone who does have symptoms, **SHOULD STAY HOME!**

Statistics show that the **groups at HIGH RISK** of infection and possible death through Covid19 **are those over 65 years old and those with any compromised immune systems.** So, it is recommended that people in those groups stay home and maintain distancing and health protocols.

That being said, Grace Church will not be telling people that they can't stay once they have come inside the church unless they are clearly showing flu-like symptoms. We expect you to make the right and healthy choice based on your own wisdom and knowledge of the symptoms and risks to yourself and others. In addition, there will be one infrared thermometer at the back of the church just in case anyone is not sure if they have a fever and wants to take their temperature to check. **If you do have a fever, you will be asked to leave.**

## **Masks**

Masks will be required during services. If you do not have a mask, let us know, and one will be provided for you. If you are not willing to wear a mask during the service, you will politely be asked to leave. We completely understand how uncomfortable wearing masks may be for some; but recognize that they do play a part in reducing possible spread of viruses. We ask humbly for your humility, patience and cooperation regarding the wearing of masks.

Worship leaders will unmask during their speaking parts (however, they are at least 15-20 feet away from the nearest people). Masks will be put back on when their speaking is complete. Pastor Charlie will perform some of the service without a mask (however the closest person to him will be at least 20 feet away). Parishioners in the pews will raise their masks up slightly while taking Holy Communion, but that is the only time expected for the people to move masks.

The windows will be open in church for fresh air, and fans will be turned on facing outside to draw air out, however we recognize that some people may need to remove masks for a moment to breathe better. If you need to remove your mask or get better breathing space, PLEASE go outside. It will also be summer, and please be aware of any heat concerns.

## **Hand Washing, Sanitizing and Bathrooms**

We ask that you have either washed or sanitized your hands before entering church. If you have not, we ask that you either use some of the hand sanitizer that the church will provide or go to one of the two available bathrooms to wash your hands.

Sanitizer will be available at all entrances, as well as in all pews.

The ONLY available bathrooms will be the bathroom in the Hudson Room and the bathroom in Parish Hall. All other bathrooms will be off limits. The basement will be off limits to everyone.

There will be signs at the bathrooms to remind you not only to wash your hands after using, but also to use one of the available sanitizing wipes to wipe down toilet handles, sink handles and door knobs, in addition to anything else you may touch while there.

The church (doors, pews, tables, etc.) will be routinely sanitized by our sexton, Sherry Schiavone. Sherry has done a very diligent job of keeping the church clean during this time, please thank her for her work when you see her. Pews and doors and other used areas will also be wiped down between services as well.

## **Safe Distancing (6 ft minimum) and Other Personal Contact Concerns**

Health guidelines suggest social distancing of at least 6 feet in gatherings and working to minimize person-to-person and person-to-object contact. Here are some of the ways we will do this at Grace Church.

## Entering/Exiting and Sitting in Church

While entering, worshipping, and exiting, you will be asked to maintain a social distance of at least 6 feet between yourself (and your family), and others at church outside your family. **PLEASE NO congregating in groups inside** the church to catch up or talk. We ask that if you would like to chat or catch up with each other, you do so outside either in the parking lot or at the picnic tables in the yard. We will call this congregating time outside, ‘churchgating’! You are welcome to bring chairs and gather outside following services, again as long as you are safe distancing and respecting each other’s space and obliging requests to wear masks.

The safety protocols from the State of CT are calling for the number of pews and seats to be no more than 25% of capacity or no more than a 100 people, whichever is less. For us, that would be 25%, which is about 60 or so seats in the sanctuary. With the social distancing suggestion of 6 feet between pews, we have had to create a seating chart where seating has been spread out to maintain social distancing. **Please refer to the seating chart further down in this** letter to better understand how seating during inside church services will work for the foreseeable future.

While in services, pews (and seats) will be marked for individuals to sit in, by household. Ushers will be present to help you find available seating. **NO sitting with people from other households please.** The seats that have been selected are at least 6 feet from the next nearest seats for safe distancing protocol.

Seating will be limited in the sanctuary, and will be first come, first serve. When all pews are filled, there is also overflow safe-distancing seating in Merrill Hall. The service will be live-streamed onto the two 58” TVs for viewing in the hall. PLEASE NOTE: Because of the way we will need to sit people, many of you will have to sit in pews you are not used to sitting in. We ask for your grace and patience throughout this unusual time, and suggest you think of it all as a spiritual adventure.

Try a new seat! 😊

You will also realize that, at some point, we may run out of seating. We ask for your patience, as we will work through those moments as they come, should they come.

We will also be asking some of you for an extra dose of grace in another way: IF we have visitors/newcomers, it will be the practice of Grace Church to allow those people to sit in the sanctuary. If our seating is filled to capacity in the marked pews, we will have to ask for members to volunteer to give up their pew and move to Merrill Hall for the service. We realize this may not be a favorable option, but ask your humble grace in being willing to generously welcome newcomers into our sanctuary on that particular day, so that they may be able experience Grace Church worship in the sanctuary as you have been able to!

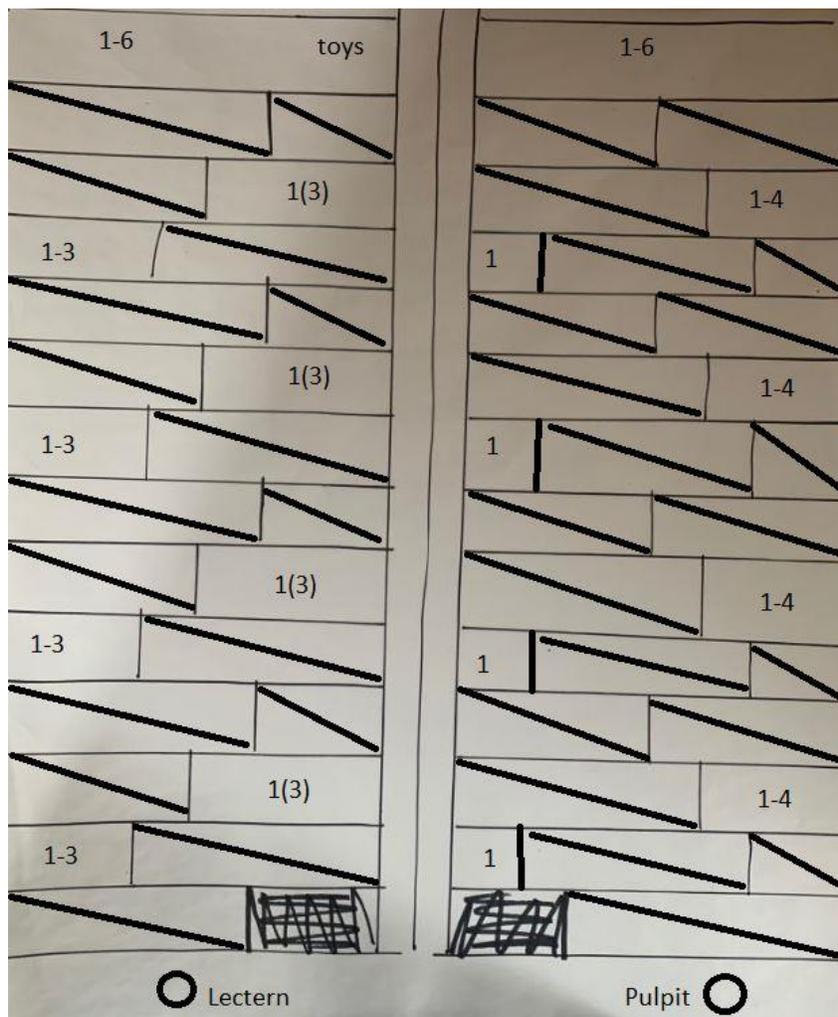
During services, Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers will sit in designated seating with their families. Eucharistic Ministers and family with them will sit in their normal seats, near the processional crosses. Lectors and family with them will sit in the choir loft. Having these designated seats frees up two rows within the pews for others to sit. Also, the seating for these ministries allows for safe distancing while they read during the service.

## Seating Chart and Protocol

As noted previously, because of social distancing at 6 feet, we will need to spread out in the pews. State guidelines are calling for no more than 25% of seating capacity, which for us is about 60 or so people. You will see below the seating chart that allows for safe distancing of at least 6 feet between pews, as well as maintaining a near 25% capacity. We expect these numbers and directions will change over time, by the way.

In each row, you will note a range of the numbers of people who can sit in that pew from one family: 1, 1-3, 1(3), 1-4 and 1-6. The 1(3) pews may be designated just for a single person, but could be used for up to 3 (this will be decided each Sunday which is why they are special). As you can guess, with the number of single people and couples we have, and fewer large families, our pews will fill up fast, and probably never to capacity. At this time, we will expect to reserve the inner rows for 1 (single) person and the outer rows for 2-3 or 2-4 people in each. Obviously, each Sunday will be different, and many will have to sit in new seats, so patience and grace please!

When all the pews are taken in the sanctuary, we will *then* have to seat people in Merrill Hall. Currently, we can sit about 22-25 people in the Hall if all seats are taken. Holy Communion will be made available in Merrill Hall as well.



Exiting the pews following the service will also follow a pre-planned strategy so as not to bunch people up in groups. We will recess in a manner that is similar to how we previously processed to receive communion, row by row, inside, out. Recessing at the end of the service will begin when the Postlude begins. I have spoken with Christy, our Minister of Music, and though we love the tradition of sitting while the Postlude is playing, we recognize that, under the current conditions, some people may want to leave immediately following the last prayer. However, if people choose, they may stay seated through the Postlude as well, and then process in the prescribed manner.

### **Greeters, Bulletins, The Peace and Offerings**

Usher/Greeters will be present at a safe distance to say “good morning” as well as to help you find seating. They will NOT shake hands, hug, or hand you anything. They may safely assist those who are concerned with checking fevers with our thermometer.

Bulletins will be placed in your pews prior to the service. They will have been folded and stapled by our Parish Administrator, Liz, while wearing gloves and a mask. They will also have been sitting out for several days after being folded. They can be taken home or thrown in waste cans at entrances upon your exit from the service.

**The Peace will be done from a distance** in whatever manner you feel comfortable with. **NO touching of any kind across pews!**

Your offerings and pledges may be placed in offering plates on tables upon entering/exiting the church. If you need envelopes, there will be extra ones on the table next to the plates.

All Bibles, Prayer Books, Hymnals and paper of any sort has been removed from the pews (and most of the sanctuary) to minimize any possible points of contact. If you want or need any of these resources, we will be glad to give you some to take home. Just contact Pastor Charlie.

### **Holy Communion Preparation and Reception from Pastor Charlie**

In the interest of full disclosure, it is the recommendation of our Diocese and Bishops that we do not offer physical communion at this time, mainly to diminish any possible contact between items and people. However, it is my belief that I have created a procedure that not only allows for contactless preparation, but an overall very safe option for taking communion that greatly diminishes any risk. I believe through the teaching of Holy Scripture, apostolic tradition of the Church, and the witness of the Holy Spirit, that the sacrament of Holy Communion was given to us by Jesus, both as a spiritual sign and physical symbol of our faith and relationship with God in Christ; and that through the sacrament we are enabled to draw closer spiritually and physically in a mysterious way to the living God and thus be strengthened in faith and hope. I also recognize that for many people, the sacrament of Holy Communion is one of the main reasons for being at the physical church, and that receiving it is a lifeline to God for them as well.

With all this in mind, it was not only my pastoral obligation to try to offer Holy Communion to the people, but to do it in as safe a manner as possible, considering the current Covid19 situation. To that end, I have created a preparation and receiving procedure for Holy Communion, with the full support of our Vestry and the full knowledge and understanding of our Diocesan Bishop Ian Douglas (who came to Grace Church in June and was shown our plan for preparation and reception). It is necessarily complex to take into consideration every possible point of contact between people and the communion elements, thereby working to reduce the possibility of contamination. Though I cannot officially claim it is fool-proof, I do believe it is very safe! However, **each person will be given the personal choice whether to receive or not, and whatever choice you make will be completely honored.**

### **Holy Communion Preparation Procedure**

Holy Communion will be offered to each individual person during the regular communion part of the service in personal cups (2 oz. portion cups with lids) that are prepared in a “**clean room**” in the basement of the church at least 3-5 days before Sunday services. This room will be routinely cleaned and sanitized by our sexton. There is also a bottom seal below the door to block any major airflow into the room. The only other person allowed in the room will be me (Pastor Charlie) for the purpose of preparing the communion cups. The only items in the room will be tables and the items used for the preparation process.

I will have a set of clothing set aside specifically for the Communion preparation process. It will only be worn during the preparation, and then afterward placed in a bag and taken home to be washed, and then re-bagged until the next preparation. My hands will be washed with anti-bacterial soap, sanitized, and then gloved before entering room. I will be wearing two masks over my face and a hair net on my head.

The procedure will consist of preparing 4 types of communion cups: regular wafers, regular wafers with wine, gluten-free wafers and gluten-free wafers with wine. Following preparation, each separate group will be kept in a labeled plastic container until needed for services. Wafers and wine will be kept in the room, and wafer boxes and wine bottles wiped down regularly. One wafer will be placed in each cup. For the cups requiring wine, a sanitized eye dropper will be used to drop 2 drops of wine onto the wafers. I have personally tested/tasted the wafer/wine after the process, and it seems that the 2-drop method is “just right”.

### **Reception Process for Holy Communion**

On Sunday, the closed plastic containers bearing the lidded plastic cups with wafers and wine drops, will be brought out for services. They will be placed on trays for the duration of the service and Eucharistic Prayer until time for reception. They will be spaced apart on the trays to cut down on any extra contact when someone picks up the cups. Each tray will also be covered in saran wrap to protect them from any possible contact from the Pastor during prayers.

Following the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, a table with cloth will be moved into the space near the altar rail where the baptismal font used to sit. (The font has been moved to the other end of the church for now). The wrap on the trays will be removed, and the trays will be placed on the clothed table. The trays will have labels designating what type of wafer/wine combo is in the cups. Trays with cups will also be made available in Merrill Hall if we have need of overflow seating. The Eucharistic Minister will watch over the table and say the words of reception.

Procession from the pews to the table will then commence in an organized and socially distant way. We will begin one pew at a time, from the inside rows to the outside. This will be discussed each Sunday prior to reception, so don't worry about learning that! Each person will approach the table at a safe distance from the previous person and move to take one cup from the tray. As you take the cup, I will say the words "the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which is shed for you". You will then take the cup with you and return to your seat. In your seat, you will then be able to open the cup, remove the bottom half of your mask (for just this short moment) and receive the wafer. Following the service there will be waste cans at all entrances for disposal of the cups (and bulletins, if need be).

Yes! This seems complex and different, and it may take a while to get used to it all, but we do it, both to stay as safe for each other as possible, while also looking to retain the power and presence of this sacred sacrament and worship experience in our lives. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

Thank you for your patience, grace, and prayers during these times. We look forward to seeing you all again soon and worshipping together in the presence of the Lord!

In Christ,

Pastor Charlie, the Staff, and the Vestry of Grace Church