A Handbook for Living in COVID Seasons

A Time of Prayer, Discernment and Preparation

The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the reality of every aspect of our lives and our churches. As we continue to lament social distancing and the many losses of this time of crisis, many of us are beginning to imagine and plan for how we will begin the transition to a time of gathering in-person in our communities again as we begin to take those steps in COVID Seasons.

How to Use this Document

As followers of Jesus Christ, our call is to love God and to love our neighbor. In this moment, we can do that by caring for God’s people and doing no harm. We are called to go the extra mile to protect those who are most vulnerable. This kind of sacrificial love can be inconvenient and perhaps uncomfortable, but we are asking the Episcopal Church in Colorado to love enough to go the extra mile together.

This document is meant to begin a conversation among church leaders. Your Office of the Bishop’s staff has compiled information on how we can reduce the risk of our churches becoming spreaders of infection as well as gathering tools that can help us think theologically and pastorally as we make decisions that will affect the whole body of Christ. In this time, we are all learning together, and our hope is that we can work together to discern best practices on how we walk the Way of Love.

We encourage each congregation to gather with core congregational leadership and work through this handbook together. We invite you to deep conversations and information gathering with as many congregants as possible. The Episcopal Church in Colorado covers a wide array of geographic and
social contexts and the Bishop and the staff of the Office of the Bishop stand ready to support you. We believe that this handbook, along with government guidelines, will help us do the challenging work of living into the current Season in ways that protect the vulnerable and mitigate risk. No one knew that COVID would last so long, so there is a great need to be creative with all forms of face-to-face worship. Due to the diversity of ministry contexts across Colorado, if you have specific questions, please contact the Disaster Response Director for the Episcopal Church in Colorado, the Rev. Canon Carl Andrews at Carl@EpiscopalColorado.org.
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Discernment

As the Body of Christ, we have embarked on a journey in uncharted territory. So many lay and clergy leaders have shown amazing creativity and resilience these last few months and it is clear that the Holy Spirit is moving in our midst. We pray for the safety and well-being of all our people as we listen to the Spirit and reimagine how we are called to be church in a COVID-19 world.

Many of you have already prayerfully discerned a path forward and others are in the midst of this discernment. We invite you to consider the following activities as you prepare and progress through all of Season II:

1. Establish a robust team of leaders to help discern a path forward and meet regularly to take the pulse of the parish.
2. Reflect on the mission and core values of your community and how these will be carried forward as you begin to move through Season II.
3. Review this document with the vestry and/or leadership team on a regular basis.
4. Investigate your own context. Study how the virus is affecting your area. What percentage of people have been tested? What has been the trend over the last three weeks? How many active cases do you currently have in your town/city/county? What is the county waiver/exemption for maximum of in-person gatherings? Can you do that safely?
5. Create a survey (sample included in resources) for the entire parish to gauge people’s comfort level for returning to in-person worship. Resurvey them after a few months to see if you should make additional changes.
6. Have conversations about what is currently going well in your congregational life. What does your congregation long for? Prioritize these longings and prayerfully consider creative ways to meet these longings and keep people safe.
7. Engage the leadership and/or the entire congregation in prayer and Bible Study about how to proceed forward. Sample materials are included in the resources.
8. Have a strategy for the coming weeks with an eye to flexibility as new information becomes available and adjustments need to be made.
9. As you plan in-person gatherings for worship, please let the Office of the Bishop know of your plans; if you have learned something new and exciting, please share it.
10. Periodically re-evaluate and possibly expand your plan throughout Season II, repeating the steps as necessary.
General Guidelines for this COVID Season

Below are some general topics and suggested protocols to consider for this season. We are well aware that each space, context, culture, and congregation will look different. Some of these will be more helpful than others. That being said, we invite you to consider the following:

- In the interest of welcoming and including all of our people, church leaders are encouraged to survey parishioners about their hopes and concerns about congregational gathering.
- Individuals with health risk factors or are 65 years and older, are encouraged per the CDC to continue to stay home and stay safe; this includes clergy, musicians, and staff.
- Church offices are encouraged to limit the number of people in the space, ensure adequate distancing, wear facemasks, and ensure proper sanitization.
- Churches might consider expanding their current online/virtual worship by including more in-person participants; we ask thorough consideration and adherence to the local, county, state variations and CDC guidelines to ensure the safety of all participating.
- Everyone, especially leaders, should model mask wearing as much as possible in this reality.

Stewardship

- Consider how to better welcome digital parishioners into your congregation in preparation for in-person worship and gatherings.
- Encourage online giving directly to your church through a reputable e-giving source.
- Remember to invite and encourage people to maintain their financial support as best they are able.
- Missional giving in these challenges times.
- Thank them on a regular basis for their stewardship.

Building use

- At this time, building use for outside groups and/or renters (12-step groups, Scouts, etc.) is strongly discouraged and we invite leaders to consult with the Chancellor and the Canon to the Ordinary regarding rental agreements and liability risks. The protocols are currently being worked on to address this and will be forthcoming in the future.
- Leaders (clergy, vestry, worship leaders) are encouraged to discern deeply about their own comfort and willingness to return to in-person worship as well as how to avoid applying any pressure whatsoever for congregants to return to in-person worship.
- Leaders are asked to consider how the church might respond if someone with COVID-19 has been in the building and in contact with others, including issues around communication to the parish, county health officials, and maintaining confidentiality.
Clergy and Lay Pastoral Leaders

- Monitor your own health profile. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Be aware of your leadership in influencing others by modeling safety and care for others.
- Physical touch of anyone is strongly discouraged and inherently risky, even in the context of a liturgy.
- Take time for a sabbath at least once a week. Be sure to attend to your mental, physical, and spiritual health with special care.
- Connect with colleagues for connection and collaboration.

Vestry/Bishop’s Committee Members and Wardens

- Monitor your own health profile.
- Assist in gathering the congregation’s opinions about re-gathering.
- Collaborate and communicate with congregations in surrounding area.
- Attend to your mental, physical, and spiritual health.
- Connect with colleagues for connection and collaboration.
- Assist in expanding communication and connection among parishioners.

For Clergy and Vestries Considering In-Person Parish Gatherings

If current trends continue, congregations may want to consider in-person gatherings. These events should be kept as small as possible to limit exposure, considering space available and current county and governmental guidelines. These waivers vary from county to county; check your respective county for accurate limits on numbers for gathering. Just because the number may be 200 or more; the real question is do you have the ushers/hosts and staff to work with high numbers safely. This category includes Bible studies, youth groups, or social gatherings.

Practical Considerations

- Online gatherings are still strongly encouraged, if possible.
- All gatherings must be within the recommended governmental guidelines. This includes wearing a mask at all times and physical distancing at least 6 feet.
- If the gathering involves food, everyone must bring their own food and beverage and utensils. Disposable gloves for all concerned.
- Include online options in addition to in-person gatherings.
For Clergy and Vestries Considering Leading Online Worship from Church Buildings

We have all faced the challenge of adapting and becoming an online church. And even with this challenge, there have been many blessings, people have joined in worship from far and wide, and parishioners who have been homebound have felt more included. In this season, when there is some potential for in-person gathering, we want everyone to remain cognizant of the risks involved, of what it means to gather some and not others, and how to maintain the new connections forged during online worship.

For congregations who do not feel comfortable producing their own online services, the Office of the Bishop is there to assist and support you and your parish in developing this capacity.

Practical Considerations

- Wearing masks combined with physical distancing significantly reduces the spread of contagion. Wearing masks and maintaining 6 feet of space (north, east, south, and west) when encountering others and in public indoor spaces demonstrates care for all who are gathered.
- Singing, chanting, and playing wind instruments pose a significant risk of viral spreading. Congregations will have to carefully consider how worship looks and feels with one person singing, and how a soloist would manage being at least 30 feet from anyone else in the room (including the accompanist) to avoid a potentially devastating outbreak.
- Do risk assessment of high-risk category personnel in any consideration.
- Basic facilities maintenance protocols are especially important now. This includes replacing all HVAC filters (furnace, air conditioning, air cleaner devices), increasing the frequency of filter replacement, and adjusting HVAC thermostat programming so that recycled air is not blowing when groups are gathering. This also includes fans or swamp coolers.
- Cleaning and sanitizing surfaces is critical during this time with particular care given to doorknobs, door push bars, railings, bathrooms, pews, chairs, and other areas touched by human hands, before and after worship.
- At all church entrances, congregations are asked to provide adequate hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
For Clergy and Vestries Considering Leading In-Person Worship Indoors or Outdoors

Some congregations in our diocese have consider moving to some configuration of in-person worship. These congregations will generally be parishes with enough space and small enough congregations to safely gather. If you to move towards worship, either inside or outside, we invite you to consider the following:

Practical Considerations

Preparing the congregation and space

- Acknowledge those unwilling to attend in In-Person Worship Indoors or Outdoors.
- Crisis communications planning is necessary as a part of opening our spaces. As an exercise and as part of crisis communications preparedness, we encourage church leaders to develop various media strategies to address several scenarios of crisis communication should they become necessary. The Canon for Communications, Mike Orr, can provide tips for crisis communications planning and media interaction.
- At least two weeks prior to any changes to your regathering plan, communicate your COVID-19 protocols across multiple venues (email, snail mail, website, social media, print) so that all in the parish have an opportunity to review and understand what is expected.
- Post visual information/signs outlining protocols and directions for physical distancing, hand cleaning hygiene, use of facemasks, respiratory etiquette, etc., in multiple locations throughout the building, particularly bathrooms.
- Provide adequate hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective for all church entrances and in all common areas. Determine in advance of in-person worship how many people can safely and comfortably fit into your sanctuary, chancel, and nave while maintaining physical distance (marking family/individual space with 6 feet distance).
- Keep windows and doors open to ensure adequate ventilation.
- Establish a plan to count and document worship attendees and cap attendance once seating/space capacity has been reached.
- Consider how ushers would respond should the number of people arriving for in-person worship exceeds the designated capacity.
- Designate a person to welcome and coordinate seating and cleaning teams.
- Articulate what are non-negotiable behavioral expectations regarding the protocols. Develop a plan to appropriately and pastorally manage those who refuse to follow safety protocols and communicate the plan to all parish leaders.
- Finding those parishioners who have the “gift and skills of detail” will enable congregations to prepare for and fulfill the safety guidelines and protect our people.
Cleaning
- For peace of mind, a deep cleaning of the building is recommended prior to first in-person worship gathering.
- Organize sanitation or cleaning teams, policies, and practices for all areas before and after worship. This should be sustainable for the foreseeable future.
- Replace all HVAC filters (furnace, air conditioning, air cleaner devices) and increase the frequency of filter replacement. HVAC thermostats should be adjusted or programmed so that air is not blowing when groups are gathering.
- Sanitize doorknobs, door push bars, railings, bathrooms, pews, chairs and other areas touched by human hands, before and after worship.
- Remove all kneelers, if possible.
- Empty and sanitize holy water/baptismal fonts, tract racks, and other furnishings, including prayerbooks and hymnals.
- Cordon off and/or close all halls, rooms, offices, hallways, and public spaces except for worship space and necessary bathrooms.
- Reduce and monitor the number of entrances to worship spaces in order to better control numbers of worshipers and enforce safety protocols and directions.

For Ushers/Greeters
- Train ushers, greeters and volunteers for every point in the parishioner’s/guest's journey from the parking lot to a designated entrance.
- Remove hymnals, Prayer Books, Bibles, welcome cards, and all other items from pews.
- Clearly mark seating areas in pews and chancel/sanctuary outlining at least 6 feet distance.
- Parishes are encouraged to eliminate as many touch points as possible and asked to promote the use of projection and personal digital devices for bulletins and orders of service. If you must provide paper bulletins, include provisions for sanitary distribution by gloved greeters/ushers and ask worship participants to take them home for disposal.
- Keep windows and doors open to ensure adequate ventilation.
- Direct users of bathrooms to disinfect surfaces and handles before and after use with cleaning wipes provided; provide signage inside bathrooms with directions on how to sanitize anything that is touched.

During Worship
- Congregations are asked to maintain online worship for parishioners unable to attend in-person worship for all services so people who must remain home can continue to participate.
- Worship leaders and participants will wear facemasks for duration of worship including entering and exiting.
- Provide adequate masks for visitors or those who forget their masks.
- Maintain at least a 6 feet physical distance between individuals/household units.
• Worship gatherings are now limited to less than 50 people while maintaining 6 feet physical distance for all. If local county and municipal guidelines permit an expanded number to gather, please contact the Disaster Response Director for the Episcopal Church about how you will adhere to safety protocols and numbers.

• Develop a plan for people entering and exiting pews or seating that allows at least 6 feet distance at all times.

• Develop a plan for the altar party vesting and entering the sanctuary that maintains at least 6 feet between each member of the altar party (30 feet for anyone singing or chanting, with masks) and between parishioners.

• Morning Prayer, Ante Communion, or other non-Eucharistic worship are appropriate to continue at this time, as well as Achieving Communion. See section on Achieving Communion for protocols.

• Develop communications around the lack of congregational singing, the use of wind instruments, and other practices which dramatically increase the risk of the spread of respiratory droplets, atmospheric chemistry, and infection.

• Singing/chanting/playing wind instruments is considered high risk. If a soloist is singing, provide at least 30 feet safe distance from the soloist. The soloist cannot be positioned in the choir loft or balcony, if it exposes the congregation.

• Bow, thumbs up, wave, peace sign to avoid physical contact as contact behaviors spread the virus.

• Keep windows and doors open to ensure adequate ventilation.

• Invite parishioners to continue with online giving as available. Place in-person offerings in a stationary, designated container. Direct parishioners not to touch the offering container. A container with a slot in the lid is recommended.

• Develop and communicate a plan for dismissing congregants in an orderly way to ensure social distancing as people exit.

• To avoid crowding and bottle necks, eliminate receiving lines following a service.

• No coffee hour, nursery care, social and educational gatherings, or other receptions at any time, unless held virtually.
Sacramental Life

Practical Considerations for Holy Eucharist, Achieving Communion

Following are some practical considerations for celebrating and distributing Holy Eucharist in the age of COVID-19 in the Episcopal Church of Colorado. This is a risk activity and all plans should address these concerns.

The Form of the Service
In an effort to decrease the time spent in any shared space that would be used for Holy Eucharist, the service should be shortened for in-person gatherings.

Some options for this include:
- Sermon may be viewed online prior to or after the service.
- In-person sermons should be brief as possible.
- Eliminate music (reminder congregational singing is not permitted due to increased risk of transmitting COVID-19).
- The Creed may be omitted on days other than Sunday.
- Any readings except the Gospel may be omitted.
- Prayers of the People may be shortened.

Considerations for the Celebrant:
- The frequency of the Celebration of Holy Eucharist does not have to be weekly and the frequency can be determined by the clergy as best suits the context.
- To maintain adherence to our Episcopal Eucharistic theology, all the elements for Holy Eucharist need to be in the physical presence of the priest consecrating it.
- The Celebrant should wear a mask. Celebrants may also choose to wear a face shield in addition to wearing a mask, but face shields do not replace a mask. The wearing of rubber gloves is necessary.
- The Celebrant must maintain at least six feet from all other people while consecrating the elements.
- Both bread and wine should be consecrated and only the sacramental Bread should be distributed. The consecrated Wine should be consumed by only one person and therefore only a very small amount should be consecrated.
- Communion vessels should be washed and sanitized after every service.
- Distribution of consecrated Bread needs to be contactless and the Celebrant will need to maintain six feet of physical distance. For instance, consecrated Bread could be placed on sanitized altar rail, vessels, paper cups, or in plastic bags to be picked up.
- Households that live together need to maintain at least six feet of distance from others not in household while receiving the sacramental Bread. Please consider how people will enter
and exit safely. Any plan should consider exercising good stewardship and caring for God’s creation by creating as little waste as possible.

In-Person Distribution by Eucharistic Ministers or Eucharistic Visitors and Lay Pastoral Leaders:

- During these unique times, trained Eucharistic Ministers can distribute Holy Eucharist after the liturgy.
- Eucharistic Ministers can be trained by their local priest and Safe Church training is not necessary if Eucharistic Ministers are simply distributing the consecrated element (no pastoral visits).
- Extended pastoral visits by Eucharistic Visitors, that are not outdoors, are discouraged at this time.
- All Eucharistic Ministers/Visitors and Lay Pastoral Leaders must wear a mask and gloves when distributing Communion. Gloves should be changed between each visit or service.
- Following the service, Eucharistic Ministers/Visitors should choose to distribute Communion to groups of people in strategic outdoor or well-ventilated locations near parishioners’ homes.

For Those Who Still Cannot or Choose Not to Receive at This Time
We recognize there may be people in our congregations that are particularly vulnerable and receiving Communion may not be an option. The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if anyone is unable to actually consume the consecrated bread and wine due to extreme sickness or disability, the desire is enough for God to grant all the benefits of communion (Book of Common Prayer, p. 457). We commend the following prayers adapted from Forward Movement, as we recognize there may be people in our congregations that are particularly vulnerable and receiving Communion may not be an option.

**Act of Reception**
In union, blessed Jesus, with the faithful gathered at every altar of your Church where your blessed Body and Blood are offered this day, (and remembering particularly my own parish and those worshiping there) I long to offer you praise and thanksgiving, for creation and all the blessings of this life, for the redemption won for us by your life, death, and resurrection, for the means of grace and the hope of glory. And particularly for the blessings given me.... I believe that you are truly present in the Holy Sacrament, and, since I cannot at this time receive communion, I pray you to come into my heart. I unite myself with you and embrace you with all my heart, my soul, and my mind. Let nothing separate me from you; let me serve you in this life until, by your grace, I come to your glorious kingdom and unending peace. Amen.

**Lord’s Prayer**
Come Lord Jesus, and dwell in my heart in the fullness of your strength; be my wisdom and guide me in right pathways; conform my life and actions to the image of your holiness; and, in the power of your gracious might, rule over every hostile power that threatens or disturbs the
growth of your kingdom, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep my heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ my Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with me now and always. Amen.

It is Bishop Kym’s expectation that priests and lay-leaders will take these considerations into account while adapting them to their specific contexts in their parish. Please contact the Reverend Canon Alex Dyer, Canon to the Ordinary, or the Reverend Canon Carl Andrews, the Disaster Director for the Episcopal Church in Colorado, if additional advice is needed.

**Holy Baptism**

It is the intention of Holy Baptism it is done context of community by a priest. Our bishop views these circumstances as what the Book of Common Prayer refers to as an emergency. Please consider the following pastoral guidance:

**Preparation**

- Risk assessment is paramount.
- Plan for physical distancing allowing no more than 50 people while maintaining 6 feet physical distance for all. If local county and municipal guidelines permit an expanded numbers to gather, please how you will adhere to safety protocols and numbers.
- Masks must be worn at all times by everyone present over the age of 11 (CDC requirement).
- Outdoor baptisms with creative substitute fonts are encouraged.
- Water is put into the font prior to service.
- Consider only one candidate per Holy Baptism liturgy at this time, unless it is multiple family members.
- In this context, the priest must be physically present. During this time, private baptisms are encouraged as a safety concern.
- The Baptism liturgy can be recorded, for later use in a virtual service or livestreamed to the parish.
- Encourage those with health or age factors to stay home/view online.

**During the Holy Baptism Service**

- The service begins at page 299 in the Book of Common Prayer with the opening acclamation and continues with the collect, one or more lessons, the Presentation and Examination of the Candidate, Baptismal Covenant, and Prayers for the Candidate.
- The priest will wash their hands just prior to the Thanksgiving over the water.
- The priest touches the water only when instructed to on page 307, with the words, “Now sanctify...”
• If a child, then the parent(s) pour water over the child being baptized, as the priest proclaims, “N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”
• If an adult, we recommend a person living with the person being baptized, pour water over the person to be baptized, as the priest proclaims the words, “N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”
• The parent or person living with the person being baptized then makes the sign of the cross on the person’s head, as the priest says, “N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

The Celebration and Blessing of Marriages
We know that marriages are festive occasions where traditionally friends and family gather to celebrate the love of two people. Even in normal times, these ceremonies can be joyous and stressful at the same time. We recommend the following guidelines:
• It is encouraged that premarital counseling be done virtually.
• Plan for physical distancing during service and allowing no more than 50 people while maintaining 6 feet physical distance for all. If local county and municipal guidelines permit an expanded number to gather, review risk assessment to adhere to safety protocols and numbers.
• Masks need to be worn at all times by everyone over the age of 11 (CDC requirements).
• Everyone signing the marriage license should use their own pens.
• In this context, the priest must be physically present.
• Outdoor liturgies are strongly encouraged.
• The service concludes with the Peace found on page 431. The bride and groom share the Peace and the witnesses share their greeting and support with applause conclude bows, thumbs up, wave, peace sign to avoid physical contact as contact behaviors spreads virus.
• Clergy are strongly discouraged from attending any receptions or social gatherings for their personal safety and to avoid possibly spreading the virus.
• Clergy should avoid posing for pictures where physical distancing is not practiced.

Ministration at the Time of Death
The period when a person nears death is a holy and tender moment. We recognize the comfort of touch and the power of an embrace for those grieving. That said, in these times and circumstances we also need to protect our own health and those around us. Please consider the following:
• This rite can be done virtually, especially when the person is dying of COVID-19. Clergy in high-risk categories are strongly encouraged not to perform this rite in-person.
• Masks and gloves need to be considered at all times.
• Physical distancing should be observed.
• If oil is to be used, a family or household member may anoint the person near death.
Funerals
We recognize that funerals in normal times are emotional events. During this pandemic, our own mortality is more real than ever for most people. We advise clergy to pay special attention to those who grieve during this time. If the death is a result of COVID-19, please take extreme precautions.

- Highly recommend contact with funerals homes that have established protocols.
- Ensure a plan for physical distancing during service and no more than 50 people while maintaining 6 feet physical distance for all. If local county and municipal guidelines permit an expanded number to gather, please be in touch with the Office of the Bishop about how you will adhere to safety protocols and numbers.
- Masks must be worn at all times by everyone in attendance.
- Cremation is encouraged during this time.
- If the remains were cremated, then sanitize the urn after receiving it from the funeral home.
- The clergy member must be physically present at the service.
- Outdoor liturgies are encouraged.
- All safety measures for Sunday worship apply to funerals as well.
- Clergy are strongly discouraged from attending any receptions or social gatherings for their personal safety.

For Clergy and Vestries Considering Reopening Parish Offices
We recognize that some parishes have reopened their offices and that staff sizes vary widely across our diocese. Please consider the work environment you are providing for your employees. We ask that no congregation compel an employee to return to the office if they do not feel comfortable coming into the office. No matter the size or composition of your staff, we invite you to consider the following:

- Offer employees the option to work remotely and no one should be punished or shamed in any way for choosing to exercise that option.
- Urge employees to do daily health assessments before entering office, and to remain home if experiencing any illness symptoms.
- Sufficient hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies will be made available to all employees.
- Masks should be worn, unless the employee is alone in their own office.
- All employees should practice regular hand washing throughout the day.
- Maintain at least 6 feet physical distancing at all times otherwise are present.
- Office use limited to 50% of occupancy as determined by Fire Marshall while maintaining 6 feet physical distance.
- Provide physical partitions between employees as needed.
- Eating meals with multiple people or use of common kitchen is discouraged.
- In-person meetings are limited to no more than 5 people with adequate physical distancing.
- Avoid use of elevators when possible and reserve elevator use for those who need it most, maintaining at least a 6-foot distance.
- High contact areas and bathrooms cleaned and sanitized periodically throughout the day.
• Ensure common areas and lobbies are cleaned and sanitized periodically throughout the day.
• Avoid sharing of equipment and sanitize equipment, such as photocopiers, after every use.
• Provide hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes at entrance and in all common areas.
• Direct users of bathrooms to disinfect surfaces and handles before and after use with cleaning wipes provided.
• Directions and protocols for safe practices to be posted at all entrances and in common areas.
• Keep windows and doors open to ensure adequate ventilation.
• Employees with age or health risk factors should be taken into consideration.

Feeding Ministries

COVID-19 has increased the vulnerability of the most vulnerable in our community. Please consider careful risk assessment. Parishes who serve those in need are responding faithfully to our call to seek and serve Christ in all people. Some congregations have also discerned to begin new outreach ministries during this time. As you undertake this important and Godly work, please consult these guidelines:

Soup Kitchens/Feeding programs
• Government protocols for group size, physical distancing, and sanitation must be followed.
• Food may not be prepared inside the church building unless a plan for safe food preparation that complies with government safety protocol is developed and followed.
• Food should be distributed for take-out if the space does not allow for physical distancing.
• Food should be distributed in “to go” bags.
• Encourage employees with age or health risk factors should continue to stay home and stay safe.
• Keep windows and doors open to ensure adequate ventilation.
• Masks and gloves should be worn with social distancing observed.

Food Pantries
• Create an alternate delivery system such as a drive through distribution or curbside pickup.
• Prepackaged bags and other foods are distributed while maintaining 6 feet physical distance. All volunteers should maintain 6 feet social distancing.
• Pre-bag produce so people are not touching in self-select models.
• Request that clients wear gloves or require them to wash their hands /use sanitizer before selecting their food products.
• Please note that clients could be sick or asymptomatic.
• Extend hours or open an additional day so clients are spread out and there isn’t congestion in the space or in the line.
Limit the number of people in a food pantry space.
If a program has an appointment system, admit fewer people for each appointment. Add additional appointment times.
Consider using texting verses having people wait in line for food at agencies. Have them wait in their cars and you text when it is their turn to come in.
Ensure regular cleaning of counters, handles on carts (if using grocery carts), doorknobs/ handles, pens, computers stations, etc.
Employees and volunteers 65 years old and older, and/or individuals with health risk factors, should continue to stay home and stay safe. Consult USDA Disaster Manuel for more guidance.

Bishop Virtual and In-Person Outdoor Visitations

Seating Logistics
- Services must be held outdoors in well-ventilated space sufficient for proper and safe physical distancing.
- A designated seating area for the Bishop, Canon to the Ordinary, and other clergy will be identified and established ensuring proper safe and physical distancing.
- Numbers at services will be based on what is safe, county exemptions/waiver, and diocesan protocols. If the church is offering parking lot services (services are broadcast into people’s vehicles with a low radio frequency transmitter), additional persons may attend in their vehicles.
- It is recommended outdoor seating individuals bring their own seating or blanket.
- Consideration should be given to virtual platform to allow for all members to participate.

Altar Party Logistics
- Each church will be responsible for providing an Order of Service Bulletin for the Bishop’s Use. The bulletin will be emailed to the Bishop for her to print off, bring, and use throughout the service. Alternatively, the church will provide an Order of Service in a pre-sanitized three-ring binder for the Bishop’s use throughout the service.
- All mic’s designated for the Bishop’s use shall be sanitized prior to the service and provided to her in a contactless manner.
- Bishop to be greeted by clergy and senior warden only.
- Service shall be limited to Morning Prayer or Ante-communion.
- Altar party will be masked and mic’d throughout the service.
- Altar will be staged to allow for sufficient physical distancing throughout the service.
- Altar party shall maintain safe and appropriate physical distancing throughout the service.
- Choir member shall be masked and mic’d and situated for a 30 foot/diameter distance between him/herself and the altar party/congregation.
- Services will be 45 minutes or less.
Service Logistics

- Single use Service “bulletins” will be made available (self-service only) consisting of the assigned. Sanitizing hand wipes will be available for wiping down the bulletins.
- Hand-sanitizer, sanitizing hand wipes, and single-use masks will be made available for persons to pick up at the beginning of the service. Signs reminding people of the Community Covenant acts – physical distancing and wearing of masks will be placed at the entryway.
- No live congregational singing.
- Congregants are encouraged not to linger after the service.

Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation

- Prior to the service, clergy will arrange for a virtual conference call or provide a designated area where the Bishop may meet with the candidates for baptism, confirmation, reception, or those who wish to reaffirm their vows, away from the congregation and in a manner in which safe and physical distancing may occur.
- Church shall provide hand sanitizer and gloves for use of the Bishop during the rite.

Third-Party Use of Church Buildings

A Message from the Bishop

As leaders across our Diocese, we explore how to safely navigate in-person gatherings; I am necessarily cautious. I am cautious because in regard to this pandemic my highest priority for our church is the safety and care of all God’s people.

I have been in conversations with our Chancellor, Lawrence R. Hitt II; our Emergency Preparedness Director, the Reverend Canon Carl Andrews; and Church Insurance – trying to imagine how we can continue to minister to our community. I have been advised again and again that use of our church buildings by outside groups puts us at risk. Most congregations do not monitor how community groups enter or exit the building, and there is difficulty of ensuring that these groups adhere to safety protocols. This means that use of our buildings by third-party groups pose an increased risk of spreading the virus, which places our congregations at greater liability risks.

Accordingly, as we make this journey of faith, I ask that congregations to delay re-opening buildings to community groups or to move very cautiously in inviting in third-party users for reentrance.

We have been on a very difficult journey that causes us to think in ways that we’ve never considered. And while I recognize that our buildings have been a safe haven for many in recovery, I am also aware that we are all at risk. As we move forward we will continue exploring how to safely
accommodate our third-party users. I look forward to hearing your ideas on developing safety plans with our 12-step groups and community partners.

We are called in this time: called to love, called to faithfulness, called to be the Body of Christ for the world. I thank God all clergy and congregational leaders who have shown such care for God’s people and who have embodied the Gospel so well in these difficult and uncertain days. I am convinced that even now, that God is with us, transforming us and blessing us to be the Church in the world.

+Kym

Annex I

COVID-19 Concerns About Third-Party Use of Church Buildings in the Episcopal Church in Colorado

January 6, 2021
Lawrence R. Hitt II, Chancellor

As church leaders in the Episcopal Church in Colorado explore with the Office of the Bishop whether and how to safely permit third-party users in our church facilities, we want to raise some concerns about the traditional use of church buildings by outside groups, for example, 12-step groups, Scouts, and outreach or feeding ministries.

We are all aware that prolonged close contact, indoors, is the primary source of COVID-19 infections. And church settings across the United States have often been linked to superspreading events.

Accordingly, as we continue to develop safety/reopening plans for our own members and ministries, the Chancellor, Bishop, and Bishop’s staff have some recommendations. Prior to allowing third-party use of any church facility, we strongly recommend that churches will have held in-person use with parishioners for at least 4 consecutive weeks. The congregational use of the space should have similar numbers to the third-party group using the building. This will allow church leadership to evaluate and resolve any issues resulting from reopening for a minimum of four weeks. Church leadership can examine how use of buildings by third-party user groups, which we have not traditionally monitored,
may or may not be accommodated. After four weeks of usage by the church, please submit a detailed safety plan for each specific third-party group to the Rev. Canon Carl Andrews.

Please know that our highest priority for reopening is, and always will be, the safety of all people. In addition, we have been advised by other experts, and by representatives of Church Insurance Company, that use of our buildings by outside groups may seriously jeopardize the safety of people and may increase our liability exposure.

With the rollout of vaccinations, all safety plans and protocols should still include social distancing, no physical contact, and universal wearing of mask. All other recommendations from federal, state, and local authorities should be complied with in order to minimize the spread of the virus.

It is important to thoughtfully assess the risks of using your buildings. No church can assure that third-party user groups will enforce our published safety policies. Similarly, since we have concluded that our members must agree not to come to church if they have been exposed to the disease or if a household member has been exposed, we have no way of assuring that third-party user groups will require the same standards from its participants. It may be that our third-party user groups do not have the ability and the resources to do the intensive cleaning required after every use of church buildings. We know that many of our outside user groups are not adequately insured in the event of negligence and harm to people, and we cannot rely on our own insurance to cover the actions or inactions of the third-party user groups. We recommend that churches consult with the Rev. Canon Carl Andrews, the Disaster Director for the Episcopal Church in Colorado with respect to insurance coverage to be provided by each third-party user group.

As we attempt to balance what is safest for all persons who return to our church facilities, it very well may be that, temporarily, until we have reopened and resolved any problems which arose, we should limit the use of our buildings to members and ministries which we oversee and control. As noted above, after a period of time for that evaluation and fine-tuning, we can then explore how to accommodate our building’s third-party users.

It goes without saying that any third-party user groups will have to follow our safety protocols and, of course, comply with governmental directives regarding size of group, physical spacing, masks, and the like. Just as each church is encouraged to share its safety/reopening plan with the Office of the Bishop, we strongly recommend that each user group provide a safety plan to its host church for review and approval. The Rev. Canon Carl Andrews, the Disaster Director for the Episcopal Church in Colorado, should be consulted with respect to such outside group safety plans.
In addition, we have prepared a template (below) for an agreement with third-party user groups and their individual members/participants in which they agree to comply with church and diocesan safety protocols and release any COVID-19 claims against the host church or the diocese. However – and this is very important – we cannot promise or guarantee that any such releases are enforceable or will provide the kind of liability protection which we seek. Therefore clergy, vestries, and bishop’s committees need to fully understand the risks that they are taking by allowing third-party use of our church facilities during the pandemic.

As we continue our work together and collaborate on safety/reopening plans, we ask you to take into account the unique risks which are linked to the use of our buildings by outside groups that we cannot control and consider delaying the re-entry of those groups until we can evaluate our own reopening and review and approve the third-party user group’s safety plan.

COVID-19 Third-Party Agreement, Release & Waiver

_______________ Episcopal Church

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has been declared a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization. COVID-19 is extremely contagious and believed to spread mainly from person-to-person contact.

Even if __________ Episcopal Church complies with all applicable laws, regulations, rules and orders, you, your child(ren) and other family members may still become infected with COVID-19 arising from participation in the program described below by you and your child(ren). Further, participating in any such programs will likely increase your risk and your child(ren)’s risk of contracting COVID-19. Also, such participation could increase for those members of your family who are “Vulnerable Individuals,” as defined by the Governor’s Safer-at-Home Order, the risk of serious illness, injury or death from contracting COVID-19.

AGREEMENT

In consideration of being permitted to participate in meetings of __________ (name of third party user group) at __________ Episcopal Church, I hereby agree to comply with all safety protocols, rules, regulations and guidelines published by the Church, and with all governmental laws, rules and regulations, as modified from time to time. If I fail to comply with any of the foregoing, I
understand that permission for me to participate will be immediately withdrawn. I also agree to follow all posted instructions and verbal instructions by the Church staff with respect to any of the foregoing.

RELEASE AND WAIVER

By signing this Release and Waiver, I acknowledge the contagious nature of COVID-19 and voluntarily assume the risk that my child(ren) and I may be exposed to or infected by COVID-19 by participating in any meetings or programs at _________ Episcopal Church (the “Church”) and that such exposure or infection may result in personal injury, illness, permanent disability, and death. I understand that the risk of becoming exposed to or infected by COVID-19 by participating in any of such programs may result from the actions, omissions, or negligence of myself and others, including, but not limited to, employees, officials, volunteers, and program participants and their families.

I voluntarily agree to assume all of the foregoing risks related to exposure to COVID-19 and accept sole responsibility for any injury to my child(ren) or myself (including, but not limited to, personal injury, disability, and death), illness, damage, loss, claim, liability, or expense, of any kind, that I or my child(ren) may experience or incur in connection with my child(ren)’s attendance at, or participation in, such programs (“Claims”).

I hereby release, covenant not to sue, discharge, and hold harmless the Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado (the “Diocese”), and their employees, officials, volunteers, agents, and representatives, of and from the Claims, including all liabilities, causes of action, damages, costs or expenses of any kind arising out of or relating thereto. I understand and agree that this Release and Waiver applies to any Claims based on the actions, omissions, or negligence of the Church and the Diocese, and their employees, agents, volunteers and representatives, whether a COVID-19 infection occurs before, during, or after participation in any program or activity.

____________________                        __________
(Printed name of Participant or Parent/Guardian of Participant if a minor)       (Signature of Participant or Parent/Guardian of Participant if a minor)  

____________________                        __________
(Date)                                                   (Date)
Vaccination Protocols

Having been vaccinated does not mean that you are not a carrier — please continue to wear a mask and practice social distancing for the sake of others, until CDC states herd immunity has been reached.

Vaccination means two injections and a period of ten days following the second injection.