



Diocese of Missouri
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS IN THE DIOCESE OF MISSOURI

MARCH 19, 2020

"Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake." (Mark 13:37)

Dear friends in Christ,

"Keep awake!" We continue to adapt to a world in the midst of ongoing change and challenge, and yet we live in the hope and promise of Easter. As people of faith we know that even in the midst of the shadow of Good Friday, Easter is coming.

As you are well aware COVID-19 has changed our lives and our world at an almost unbelievable pace. Information is shifting daily, at times almost hourly, and yet we are called to be the church, to be beacons of faith, hope, and love in the world. We are assured, as we follow the risen Christ in new ways that "to your faithful people O Lord, life is changed, not ended." (BCP 382).

The guidance that follows is intended to address this new reality in which we find ourselves and the practical reality of continuing the work of Christ in the world. These guidelines will be updated as needed and it is our plan to continue to communicate with you as things continue to evolve around us and to ensure that we are all, in this new and uncharted reality, safe and secure from all alarms. To that effect we will gather each Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. CDT via video conference to check-in and offer updates as necessary. (Join the meetings here: <https://zoom.us/j/763146761>.) The primary concern of the Bishop's office is to ensure the health and well-being of the clergy of this diocese.

At this time we are also extending the call for a fast from public worship in solidarity with the most vulnerable among us until **May 31, 2020**, at which time we will reevaluate the ongoing situation. We are aware that this will impact the celebration of Holy Week and Easter. Please be assured that we will communicate ways in which these sacred events in our Christian life may be celebrated in light of our new reality.

May God bless and keep you, those you love and those whom you serve, now and always.

The Rt. Rev. Wayne Smith,
10th Bishop of Missouri

The Rev. Deon K. Johnson,
Bishop-elect of Missouri

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER

Prayer changes things. Prayer changes us. Maintain a vibrant and lively prayer life. Ground yourself in daily prayer for your family, those whom you love, for your communities and for the world. Post prayers and reflections on social media and mail devotions to those who are not online.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS

Ours is an incarnational faith and as such we are naturally inclined to gather with each other. For the foreseeable future, in compliance with the Centers for Disease Control and Department of Health, both outdoor and indoor gatherings must be limited to ten (10) people or less while conforming to the six (6) feet of physical distancing.

BAPTISMS

Baptisms form the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ and are full initiation into the body of Christ. While we desire to gather together to celebrate the beginning of the journey of faith, at this time Emergency Baptisms, when the pastoral need arises, are the only baptisms to take place.

FUNERALS

Christians bury their dead. We are a people who believe that “through Jesus Christ our Lord; who rose victorious from the dead, and comforts us with the blessed hope of everlasting life. For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended; and when our mortal body lies in death, there is prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens.” (BCP 382)

While the prohibitions for gatherings of more than ten (10) people are in place, funerals involving a body are to be conducted at the graveside only with immediate family conforming to the physical distancing guidance distributed by the Centers for Disease Control and the local Department of Health. It is recommended that memorial services be scheduled at a later date for those who have been bodily interred.

Cremains can be held indefinitely until such a time as gatherings are allowed. Funeral services for those who have been cremated can be scheduled at a later date.

WEDDINGS

The joining of two people in heart and mind in the bonds of Holy Matrimony is an expression and image of Christ’s love for the world. During this time of physical distancing, gathering to celebrate weddings is suspended until such a time as gatherings of more than 50 are allowed.

ORDINATIONS

The conferring of Holy Orders has been a part of the life of the Church for centuries. The Canons of the Episcopal Church allow for ordinations to take place with a minimum of one bishop, two priests, and two lay persons. While this may not be ideal, it offers a possible way forward for the work of the Church to continue in these extraordinary times.

VESTRIES & BISHOP'S COMMITTEES

In the Episcopal Church vestries and Bishop's committees are responsible for the financial and legal continuance of congregations and missions. Although most vestries are comprised of fewer than ten (10) people, we strongly recommend that these governing bodies meet virtually by phone conference or video conference. Maintaining regular contact with wardens and vestry members, along with regular meetings, is essential during this time.

ACTIONS OF VESTRIES AND BISHOP'S COMMITTEES

- Votes by email must be unanimous and should employ the "Reply All" feature in tallying the votes.
- Phone or video conference meetings follow the same rules as in-person meetings, provided that time is set aside from deliberation prior to a vote.

FOOD PANTRIES AND FEEDING MINISTRIES

Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." (Matthew 25:31-36) Caring for those who are unhoused and hungry in our community has been and continues to be a vital ministry in the Diocese of Missouri. To ensure the safety of our lay and ordained ministers and those whom we serve, the following procedures should be followed:

- No more than ten (10) people gathering to serve or prepare meals with the appropriate physical distancing.
- Wash hands, utensils, and surfaces with soap and water often.
- Do not cross-contaminate food items.
- Gloves are to be worn at all times.
- Masks should be worn, if possible and replaced every twenty (20) minutes.
 - The Centers for Disease Control has issued an [update](#) that allows for bandanas and scarves to be used in place of face masks.
- All meals are to be served to-go and preferably outside or in large open indoor spaces with physical distancing guidelines in use.

PASTORAL VISITS

Paul encourages us to care for each other in love and visit those who, because of infirmity or illness, are unable to be a part of the community. We are encouraging churches to find creative ways of staying in touch with those who are isolated and vulnerable and to give them spiritual support and also practical support as far as possible. At this time only clergy, or designated Eucharistic Ministers or Pastoral caregivers, are to make pastoral visits. The guidance on protecting yourself and others listed below is to be followed.

SOBRIETY SUPPORT

Many of our congregations wish to continue to support those who rely on sobriety support groups. While these are important gatherings, it is recommended that members of these groups be directed to onlinegroupaa.org, which offers many resources during these times of physical distancing.

PROTECT OTHERS BY PROTECTING YOURSELF

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact.
- Especially avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.
- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces **daily**. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

SUGGESTIONS TO PREVENT SOCIAL ISOLATION

Christianity by its nature is a faith that centers on being social. Our Trinitarian creeds point us toward a God who is a three-personed community. Our most sacred act is at its heart a banquet which displays God's love for the world through Jesus Christ. For many in our communities gathering for church on Sundays is the highlight of their week. Since we are no longer able to gather for public worship, maintaining social connection is more important than ever.

Psychologists tell us that social isolation can lead to very serious mental and physical health risks. These recommendations encourage us to love our most vulnerable neighbors during a time of uncertainty made worse by an inability to gather with friends and neighbors. Consider the following:

- Pair members of a congregation with each other to regularly check-in with each other.
- Create a phone tree to ensure that those who may not be online can maintain connections.
- Find affinity groups that can meet virtually.
- Create a list of community and faith-based organizations that you or the people in your faith community can contact in the event they lack access to information, health care services, support and resources.
- Mail bulletins, newsletters and other means of communication to those who are without internet.
- For many of the most vulnerable in our communities, the telephone will be the easiest and most accessible way to keep in contact. Invite young people to contact the elderly and talk them through installing apps that allow wider social connections.