

# DIOCESE OF MISSOURI PANDEMIC TASK FORCE

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## INTRODUCTION:

*This year's entire Diocesan Convention, our 181st, will be held virtually via Zoom. Ensuring the maximum safety of delegates, alternates, clergy and guests, this technology also will facilitate the efficient conduct of business -- and provide opportunities to learn more about the many ministries within the diocese and share a bit of fun as well. Nevertheless, a number of questions have been raised which are addressed in the following Q & A's.*

**1. *What is the status of Covid-19 infections in Eastern Missouri (the diocese's footprint), and what might we expect by Convention?***

There is variation across the state, although this may be a matter of timing as the virus spreads. Metropolitan St. Louis is experiencing a significant surge in cases and hospitalizations, and Covid-19 is raging virtually out of control in Southeast Missouri, with positivity rates as high as 24%. The western counties of the diocese also have experienced a surge in cases. Predicting the virus' trajectory over the next several weeks is a challenge, but virtually all medical and public health experts anticipate a "wave" that could very well overcome hospitals and funeral homes.

**2. *How does Covid-19 spread?***

The most frequent source of Covid-19 infection is through airborne particles of the virus spread by breathing, talking, singing and coughing. Prolonged contact in close physical proximity to others significantly increases to potential for exposure. It's also important to note that the virus can survive on surfaces for extended periods of time. Therefore, social distancing, mask wearing and frequent hand washing are essential to stemming the spread of Covid-19.

**3. *Do all people infected with Covid-19 experience symptoms and, if so, what are they?***

While the majority of those infected experience mild to severe symptoms, approximately 40% report none at all and feel fine. For those who do have symptoms, fever, a persistent dry cough, shortness of breath, loss of the sense of taste and smell, overwhelming fatigue, aching muscles, loss of appetite and an upset stomach are often present individually or in combination.

**4. *Should you gather with others for any part of Convention?***

We strongly recommend that you not gather in common spaces as a delegation. The rapidly rising prevalence of the virus simply makes this too dangerous. Although disappointing not to be able to share in-person conversation with church siblings as we normally do at Convention, electronic communication will necessarily be the norm this year.

5. *Are there any circumstances in which people will gather in-person for any or all of Convention?*  
Despite the preceding recommendation, we recognize several circumstances in which people may need to gather in-person. First, the officers of Convention (Bishop, Secretary and Chancellor), as well as the production staff, will be present in the sanctuary of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion - University City throughout the official proceedings. Second, some delegations may not have access to high-speed internet at home and will need to gather together in a common space which affords the necessary access. And finally, those who need interpreter services will likely meet in shared space.
6. *If meeting in a common space, what precautions should be taken?*  
Participants should be tested for Covid-19 and the results known within 3 days of Convention. In addition, contact with those who are symptomatic should be avoided in the 2 weeks prior to gathering together. Properly sized and fitted masks should be worn and 6' of social distancing maintained throughout the meeting. **(Please note that wearing a mask is NOT a substitute for social distancing)**. Hands should be washed frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol gel should be used to complement hand washing. In selecting a space, significant consideration should be given to room size and the rate of air circulation.
7. *If you have been with others for any part of Convention, what should you do as follow-up to minimize the potential spread of the virus?*  
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines are available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html>. If you have simply been out in public and not exposed (to the best of your knowledge), follow the recommendations under the category, "All US residents other than those with a known risk exposure." If you discover you may have been exposed to Covid-19, follow the recommendations under, "Individual who has had close contact."
8. *With these cautions being urged for Convention, why are some of the churches in the diocese open while others are not?*  
Congregations within the Diocese of Missouri are operating under the September 15, 2020 Guidance issued by the Offices of the Bishop and available on the diocesan website at: [diocesemo.org](http://diocesemo.org). The document reflects the different impact of Covid-19 in various communities and sets forth the requirements for regathering in-person. Some parishes have been able to meet these standards, while others cannot or, even if they can, have chosen not to regather out of an abundance of caution. Since Convention participants come from congregations that have maintained different levels of personal isolation, minimizing in-person contact during Convention is an essential safeguard for all.
9. *With the holidays quickly approaching following Convention, how will we celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas?*  
Congregations celebrating Thanksgiving will do so under the guidance of the Bishop's September 15, 2020 policy. Bishop Johnson has appointed an ad hoc committee to explore options for celebrating Christmas and advise him accordingly.