



DIOCESE OF MISSOURI PANDEMIC TASK FORCE UPDATE

MARCH 18, 2021

(revised March 26, 2021)

The Rev. Maria L. Evans, M.D.

David Hirstius, M.D.

Beth Mosher

The Rev. Marc D. Smith, Ph.D.

With the decline in the number of Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths, as well as the administration of more than 1M doses of the three federally authorized vaccines, we clearly are making progress against the pandemic. Nevertheless, the danger remains real. First, we are nowhere near the 80-90% vaccination rate necessary to achieve “herd immunity.” Furthermore, the distribution of vaccines throughout Missouri has been woefully uneven, regularly oversupplying some communities and providing too few in others. Third, while Covid-19 case rates have stabilized, they are still unacceptably high. And finally, the impact of hundreds of thousands of students returning from unmasked spring break partying will not be known for 4-6 weeks. Together, these factors suggest that although a modest loosening of restrictions for in-person gathering may be appropriate for some congregations, others will continue to require a more cautious approach. The following **guidelines** are intended to assist clergy and lay leaders throughout the diocese in developing “regathering plans” responsive to the needs and challenges of their specific communities.

VACCINATION

- For any expansion of in-person gathering, it is recommended that clergy and lay worship leaders, teachers and volunteers (e.g. ushers) be ≥ 2 weeks post-completion of their course of vaccination.
- Because of the uneven and tiered distribution of vaccines, certain groups of people (e. g. young people, urban residents, people of color) have not had access to them and likely will not for several months. Therefore, to avoid disenfranchising any of our members, we strongly recommend against using vaccination status as a criterion for lay attendance at indoor worship.
- However, vaccination status may be considered in returning to small group (≤ 10) discussions and other activities (e.g. Bible study, vestry meetings, etc.)

IN-PERSON WORSHIP

- Provided the local Covid-19 case rate does not increase by $>10\%$, congregations may expand in-person worship to 35% of capacity. For example, if the local case rate is 100/100K population and does not increase above 110/100K, an increase in attendance may be considered.

- Congregants must always be masked and maintain ≥ 6 feet of social distancing. Attention should be given to the force and patterns of air circulation in determining the spacing layout.
- Congregational responses in the liturgy are permitted but congregational singing is not.
- Only the host may be distributed for Communion.
- Liturgical leaders (e.g. presider, preacher, etc.) should remain masked throughout the service; however, if they do not, they should keep ≥ 6 feet of distance from each other and ≥ 12 feet from congregants.
- Choral singing is permitted provided members of the choir are masked when singing and are ≥ 6 feet apart and ≥ 12 feet from congregants. In-person rehearsals should be limited to ≤ 30 minutes.
- Wind instruments may be used in worship provided that: players are ≥ 6 feet apart and ≥ 12 feet from congregants; performers are masked (with a small slit for the mouthpiece); and instrument bells (except recorders, flutes and oboes) are covered with MERV-13 material or a 3-layer surgical mask (e.g. GB/T32310)

IN-PERSON SMALL GROUP GATHERING

- Small groups of ≤ 10 persons may gather for meetings, Bible study and similar indoor activities. It is recommended that participants are ≥ 2 weeks post-completion of their course of vaccination, masked and maintain ≥ 6 feet of social distancing.

DIOCESAN APPROVAL

- The clergy and congregational “regathering committee” are responsible for submitting a written plan for initiating or expanding in-person worship and/or meetings to the Offices of the Bishop for review and approval. The plan must include the specific safeguards to be taken to protect participants.
- Requests for a variance from these guidelines must be submitted in writing to the Offices of the Bishop for review and approval and document the specific rationale for the variance, as well as the safety precautions to be employed.

