



UPDATED GUIDANCE *for* GATHERINGS *in the* EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE of MISSOURI
EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1, 2020

The OFFICES *of the* BISHOP
1210 LOCUST STREET, ST. LOUIS MO 63103



THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE *of* MISSOURI

August 27, 2020

Dear Friends in the Risen Christ;

I am grateful for your leadership, your courage, and your deep abiding faith in continuing the essential work of the Church in the midst of a pandemic. In so many ways you have continued to seek and serve Christ, in new and innovate ways across the Diocese of Missouri. The resilience, determination, and courage we have shown as a Diocese in adapting to a changed reality, is a testament to our commitment to sharing the Good News of God in Christ in word and deed.

While our understanding of COVID-19 continues to evolve, it is important for us to remember that ours is a faith that rests in hope. Hope grounds us in our current reality while looking towards a not too distant future. This pandemic will end. This too shall pass.

At this time, it is incumbent upon us to make plans for the safe resumption of in-person worship based on the most up-to-date scientific data and the recommendations of the departments of health across the Diocese. **Effective September 15, 2020, in-person worship may resume within the Diocese of Missouri** provided that the guidelines set forth in this document are satisfied, including the submission of regathering plans for review. Already submitted plans may be updated to reflect the new requirements.

Provisions are being made for the appointment of a Diocesan Pandemic Task Force, whose primary role will be to provide ongoing guidance, assistance and support to communities of faith within the Diocese of Missouri.

I am exceptionally proud of the faithfulness and care you have shown to each other and beyond grateful for the trust you have placed in me during this time of uncertainty.

We are in this together as followers of Jesus and as we continue on this journey. May God bless and keep you, those you love, and those whom you serve, now and always.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deon K. Johnson".

The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson,
Eleventh Bishop of Missouri

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This revision, effective September 1, 2020, supersedes all previous guidance during the time of pandemic. This document incorporates elements of discussions between Bishop Deon, clergy and lay leaders from around the Diocesan household and the Diocese of West Missouri in conversation with the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Additionally, it includes counsel from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Johns Hopkins University, the Church Insurance Company, the House of Bishops, and Episcopal Relief & Development.

ASSEMBLING FOR IN-PERSON PUBLIC WORSHIP: PERMISSIBLE AS OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

Communities of faith in the Diocese of Missouri may return to public in-person worship when COVID-19 infections in your county have been contained and are not increasing. Various data measures can be used to determine whether that is the case, including:

- The number of COVID-19 cases in your county has decreased for 14 days or has held steady with a mere handful of cases (five or fewer). Find this information on the [Missouri COVID-19 dashboard website](#).
- The infection rate (R-naught) is less than 1.0, which means that on average in the community, each infected person is infecting less than one other person and the total number of current cases is shrinking. The infection rate for many Missouri counties, but not all, may be found on the [Covid Act Now website](#). Click on the map of Missouri counties to find county-by-county data or use the search bar at the top of the page.
- The positive test rate is less than 10%, preferably closer to 3% or less. The positive test rate measures how many people test positive compared to all who were tested in a given period of time and indicates whether testing is widespread enough to detect most new cases. The ability to identify and isolate cases is key to controlling the infection. This information may also be found on the [Covid Act Now dashboard](#).

Verify the data you've collected by calling your county's health department and asking if COVID-19 has been contained. Ask also if the county retains the ability to test anyone who seeks COVID-19 testing. Also confirm health officials in your county have systems in place to contact all individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and to complete contact tracing.

Each congregation's reopening team, described below, is responsible for assessing the available local data and determining the conditions in which the risk of infection is low enough that it is reasonable to offer in-person worship subject to the Regathering Plan that will be submitted to the Bishop's office.

CONGREGATIONAL REGATHERING TEAMS

Each congregation must establish a congregational regathering team composed of at least three (3) people whose tasks are the following:

- Develop, refine or update a regathering plan for submission to the Bishop's office.
- Monitor local public health conditions.
- Remain in contact with bishop's staff as you monitor local outbreak conditions. Regathering teams need not inform the Bishop's office of every decision they make as long as they are following their regathering plan. However, if conditions necessitate returning to worship from home, please let the Bishop's office know.

REGATHERING PLAN

If the risk of infection in your county has been significantly reduced in accordance with the public health standards above and your congregation's regathering plan has been submitted to the Bishop's office, you are permitted to hold indoor gatherings, depending on the local public health recommendations. Regathering plans must conform to the standards outlined above. The earliest permissible date to return for in-person public worship is September 15, 2020.

No congregation or member of the clergy is required to return to its church building or grounds for in-person public worship. You have the Bishop's full support if you judge that continuing to stream or record from home or from your church building is the best choice for your congregation.

LIVESTREAMING AND RECORDING WORSHIP FROM CHURCH BUILDINGS:

In the event that there is no significant decline or holding steady of cases within your county live streaming and recording worship may continue.

A group of no more than 10 individuals may return to churches for the purpose of livestreaming or recording worship. It is strongly recommended that clergy and lay people aged 65 and older or who have underlying medical conditions that put them at greater risk from the virus stay home, but the decision is left to the individual. In addition, these live-streamed or recorded sessions must conform to the safety requirements outlined below.

No congregation or member of the clergy is required to return to its church building to livestream or record worship. You have the Bishop's full support if you determine that continuing to stream or record from home is the best choice for your congregation.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

While COVID-19 continues to be a part of our lives, and until such a time as a vaccine is developed, the best way we can love our neighbors is to continue those practices that science tells us will keep us safe. The following guidelines are to allow for the safe distribution of Holy Communion, should your community of faith choose to celebrate the Eucharist at in-person gatherings.

- **AT RISK MEMBERS:** Those older than 65 years old, with a compromised health condition or caring for the sick in any way, are encouraged to refrain from in-person worship at this time.
 - Anyone who is ill, has a fever, cough, respiratory infection, etc., should stay home as an act of justice to the whole community.
- **PHYSICAL DISTANCING:** Physical distancing of at least six (6) feet, is to be observed and signified by signs, tape, or other means. This includes both indoor and outdoor areas.
- **NUMBER IN ATTENDANCE:** In-person worship offered indoors will be limited in attendance, depending on the guidelines set by public authorities.
- **CONGREGATIONAL SEATING:** Mindful of limitations and the physical layout of the church, seating should be clearly marked to allow for physical distancing (such as seating people in alternating pews with a 2-pew separation or seating in different sections for different Masses).
 - Those living in the same household may sit together without distancing.

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- **FACE COVERINGS/MASKS:** Masks are to be worn by everyone, including the clergy, when approaching church and inside church (except for those under 2 years old per CDC guidelines).
- **COLLECTION:** Baskets or offering plates should not be passed from person to person.
- **FONTS AND HOLY WATER RECEPTACLES:** All containers for Holy Water should be drained and left empty at this time.
- **MUSIC/SINGING:** Music is considered an element of prayer and is therefore an important part of worship. Singing during in-person worship is strongly discouraged.
 - Health experts indicate that singing produces 6-10x more droplets from our mouths than speaking. Keeping singing to a minimum is advised and the congregation should not remove their masks to sing.
 - If there is a "choir" present, it should be as small as possible with each member spaced about 10'-15' apart.
 - Instrumental music is encouraged along with the play of hymns with the recitation of the text by the congregation.

OUTDOOR GATHERINGS

Gathering outdoor for worship is strongly encouraged while adhering to physical distancing and the recommendations of local health departments. Requirements for group size, physical distancing, sanitation and use of masks must be followed.

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

Weddings and funerals can occur while adhering to the guidelines provided in this document.

BAPTISMS

If baptism is necessary during the reopening period, the priest should use these guidelines:

- The service of Baptism should proceed as normal through the blessing of the water. The presider can bless the water but should thoroughly wash or sanitize hands before touching the water.
- In the spirit of the BCP provision for Emergency Baptism (BCP, p. 313), parents may administer the water and the Presider anoint the child.
- Following the baptism, the presider continues with the welcome of the newly baptized.

FEEDING MINISTRIES

Ministries responding to food insecurity or medical support may continue, using physical distancing guidelines and other practices suitable for the particular ministry. Requirements for group size, physical distancing, sanitation and use of masks must be followed.

GUIDANCE FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

These guidelines are intended to be an aid and a the minimum standard in the safe distribution of Communion for in-person worship.

- At the start of liturgy, in printed bulletins, and again at the time of Communion, the priest should explain how Holy Communion will be distributed. Consider publishing the worship bulletin online or via email, so that people can print it at home or use it on their mobile devices.
- During the Eucharistic Prayer, the Celebrant's mask may be removed, provided that the containers for the bread and wine remain covered (a pall or purificator may be used for this purpose).
- The distribution and consumption of the consecrated wine is suspended for clergy and laity. The chalice should be consecrated and reverently disposed of after the liturgy.
- The priest, deacon, or lay minister while distributing communion **must** wear a mask.

- The use of the altar rail for the distribution of communion is suspended.
 - Communion "stations" are encouraged with the clergy person or the Eucharistic Minister standing in a central location wearing a mask to distribute communion.
- The floors/aisles should be clearly marked at 6' intervals to ensure proper physical distancing.
- Maintaining a single-file is necessary for the distribution of Communion. Multiple Communion ministers may be used as long as one-way traffic patterns are observed.
- When approaching to receive communion, the communicant **should remain masked**.
- Communion is to be received in the hand only.
- **After receiving the bread the communicant should, at a distance of at least 6 feet, lower their mask below their chin in order to consume. The communicant immediately replaces their mask after consuming the bread.**
- Those distributing communion must sanitize their hands immediately before and after distributing Communion, and when at all possible, should utilize a sanitizing solution (at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol) to sanitize their fingers when incidental contact is made with someone receiving communion.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT PHYSICALLY PRESENT FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP.

The Book of Common Prayer allows for the distribution of communion to those who are sick or to those who are unable to be present for the public celebration of the Holy Eucharist. During this time of pandemic the distribution of communion to members of the parish at home should be done as soon as possible following the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

- The Consecrated bread may be delivered to those who are homebound provided that:
 - There is no physical contact
 - The bread has been individually wrapped/prepared with limited contact.
 - After participating in the online celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
 - By the clergy at any time following the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
 - By Eucharistic visitors only on the day in which the Eucharist was celebrated.

- Along with the bread the following prayers are to be included:

Before Receiving Communion

Be present, be present, O Jesus, our great High Priest, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread; who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. *Amen.*

After Receiving Communion

O Lord Jesus Christ, who in a wonderful Sacrament has left unto us a memorial of your passion: Grant us, we pray, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of you redemption; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Explore the possibility of limiting or entirely avoiding the distribution of printed worship materials.
- Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home and seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Continue to allow staff members who use the church office to work from home as much as possible.
- Consider limiting the number of people who use the church office and discouraging visitors.
- Require everyone present to wear a mask. Ensure that high-touch surfaces are regularly sanitized.
- You must drain and sanitize all holy water stoops and baptismal fonts.
- You must maintain sufficient amounts of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels.
- You must clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces like light switches, pews, doorknobs, restrooms, etc.
- You must have a clearly articulated plan to communicate your safety standards and practices to the congregation.

WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

We have been worshiping online for almost six months. The change from online worship to in-person worship will not happen all at once, and not everyone now worshiping online will feel comfortable coming to church right away. The spiritual needs of the congregants who prefer to continue worshiping online must still be met.

Additionally, due to restrictions on the size of public gatherings, many churches will need to manage attendance to remain within the law. This may require both registration and additional services. If you choose to return to your buildings while those over 65 and those with underlying medical conditions are being advised to stay home, how will you provide for them and for others who do not feel safe attending church?

A CHECKLIST FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP

PREPARING THE FACILITY FOR RE-GATHERING	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Clean and disinfect high-touch/shared surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, faucets and taps, elevator buttons, railings.		
Designate entrances and exits with clear signage.		
Place hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol content at entrances and exits and throughout the facility. If the Holy Eucharist is to be celebrated, have hand sanitizer available for worshippers as they proceed to and from receiving communion.		
Clear signage and markers to ensure proper physical distancing.		
Determine whether your usual worship space is the best place for worship at this time. Perhaps you have a parish hall that is larger and more suitable just now		
Clearly indicate the route worshippers are to use from the entry to the worship space and indicate proper physical distancing, perhaps with markers on the floor.		
Close common areas.		
Close rooms that will not be in use.		
Remove all shared items such as brochures and hymnals, and any soft surfaces such as children’s busy bags and stuffed animals.		
To indicate proper physical distancing, assign seating (rearrange chairs or rope off every second pew etc.)		

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PREPARING THE FACILITY FOR RE-GATHERING	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Ensure that liturgical participants will have appropriate physical distance from each other.		
Place floor indicators/markers to show physical distance for those who are waiting to receive Holy Communion.		
Designate how many people will be allowed in a bathroom at one time; post a sign with floor indicators in the hallway to show physical distance for those who are waiting.		
Provide signage in bathrooms to ensure proper handwashing and indicate a procedure for using faucets, door handles, stall handles, toilet/urinal handles, etc. such as turning off the faucets with a paper towel and using available disinfectant wipe to clean handles on stall, urinals and door.		

PREPARING WORSHIPERS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Communicate that staff, volunteers and worshipers who are ill or who have been exposed to COVID-19 must stay home.		
Communicate that those with underlying medical conditions and those over 65 years old are at a higher risk of experiencing worse symptoms than others if they contract the virus.		
Communicate changes to worship space.		
Communicate that worshipers are asked to keep physical distance at all times, practice good hand hygiene and sneeze into their elbows.		
It is required that worshipers wear masks/face coverings when in the church.		
Children are to remain with their parents at all times.		

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Communicate changes to the worship service in advance (e.g., no congregational singing, reception of Holy Communion, no greeting or coffee hour before or after service, etc.).		
PREPARING FOR WORSHIP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Determine the number of people allowed in the worship space and a plan is in place to determine how many services will be offered in order to accommodate those who would wish to worship.		
Determine an "overflow" space in the event the main worship space is filled.		
A plan is in place to determine who will worship when.		
A plan is in place to continue to include in worship those who will not attend in-person worship.		
A list is kept of worshipers, staff and volunteers at all services in case someone later tests positive for COVID-19 and their movements must be traced. This list will be kept for two weeks before it will be destroyed or deleted.		
Worship is planned in accordance with public health guidelines.		
Congregants are reminded to clean their hands upon entry and exit.		
A plan is in place to help worshipers participate in the service. A single-use bulletin is left on chairs or pews AND/OR the bulletin is available online for use with personal tablets or other electronic devices.		
Recorded or streamed music may be played. Soloists and instrumentalists may provide music following recommendations for safe distancing and/or barriers.		
Children will remain with their parents, even if a children's time is offered.		
The Peace is shared without physical contact.		

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The offering plate is neither circulated nor presented at the altar. There is a plan to receive gifts safely. Encourage worshipers to make contributions through electronic means.		
A plan is in place to offer the sacraments safely.		
People are designated to clean and disinfect the worship space between services.		

THE HOLY EUCHARIST & COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Those preparing the elements and vessels for Holy Communion use excellent hygiene procedures.		
Clergy wash and sanitize their hands before and after consecrating the elements and distributing Holy Communion.		
Clergy and assistants wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion.		
Worshipers are directed to receive communion in a one-way traffic pattern allowing for physical distance between family groups.		
Communicants sanitize their hands as they proceed to receive communion.		
It is recommended that to minimize close contact, the communicant pauses 6 feet away from the minister, who says, "The body of Christ. Bread of Heaven." to which the response "Amen" is given. The minister should take special care not to touch the communicant, or should pause to sanitize hands again, if contact is made.		
Communion in one kind is recognized as a full experience of the Sacrament.		
Common cup and intinction are not permitted.		

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HOLY BAPTISM	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
The font is sanitized and filled with clean water.		
The person to be baptized, if an infant, remains in the arms of their family.		
Family groups at the font maintain physical distance.		
The clergy wears a mask at the font.		
Water is poured on the baptized with a shell or other vessel.		
The baptized is anointed with oil in a cotton ball.		
A member of the baptismal party lights the baptismal candle from the paschal candle as the words of presentation are said.		

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Weddings and funerals held within the church building must follow the same guidelines as other worship services.		
Outdoor gatherings of up to the maximum number allowed by health officials, practicing physical distancing are permissible.		

GENERAL	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Staff and volunteers receive information and training about new processes.		
Staff and volunteers have access to masks and hand sanitizer.		
Offering counters have access to gloves and masks.		
People are designated to clean and sanitize high traffic areas, including washrooms, between services.		

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Leaders remain aware of new public health guidelines. Be prepared to discontinue in-person worship if levels of infection rise.		
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RENTERS/OUTSIDE GROUPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETED
Congregations may permit outside groups to use the facility providing they follow all health guidelines regarding physical distancing, etc., and the congregation/rental groups have resources to handle the cleaning requirements between each use. Facility rentals should be suspended if groups cannot or will not adhere to gathering restrictions.		
Written details as to how the rental/outside group will meet health guidelines, should be submitted prior to their use of the facility.		
Insurance certificates for outside groups should be kept on file.		
Other considerations:		