



Episcopal Diocese of Washington COVID-19 Response Guidelines and Parameters

As a companion document to [Turning Toward the Future with Caution and Hope: A Phased Approach to Regathering as Church](#), we offer these specific guidelines for congregations in the Diocese of Washington as they consider preparing for in person worship. The guidelines are subject to change according to directives from civic authorities. Individual congregations are to seek authorization from the bishop's office before moving from one phase to another as circumstances allow. The bishop may move a congregation back to a more low-risk phase if risk factors change and merit such action.

Phase One:

Suspension of Live In-Person Public Worship Services and Public Use of Property

Civic authorities shut down all public gatherings.

Numbers of known infections and deaths rising or near peak levels in Maryland and the District of Columbia.

Worship:

- Congregations encouraged to offer online worship.
- Services live-streamed using as few persons as necessary.
- Online social gathering and community building are encouraged.
- All pastoral care done via telephone or video call, unless granted permission by the bishop.

Other property use:

- Outside tenants or small groups prohibited from gathering.
- Schools closed.

Staff:

Staff is strongly encouraged to work remotely except for essential tasks, such as processing mail, checks, bills and payroll, and setting up for live-streaming.

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Phase Two:

Significantly-limited Live In-person and Public Use of Property

Civic authorities allow for limited numbers of persons to gather.

Numbers of known infections and deaths have declined in the District or country for fourteen (14) consecutive days.

Worship:

- In conjunction with online services, a limited number of worshipers may gather for in-person worship. Number of worshipers are dependent upon modified seating capacity to allow social distancing by household. Where possible, outside worship is encouraged.
- Worshipers known to be infectious, actively sick or symptomatic are not to attend or must leave immediately. Worshipers with underlying health risks are discouraged from attending service.
- Refrain from using Prayer Books, Hymnals, Pew Bibles. Single use bulletins and screens only.
- Copies of Covenant for Regathering are available in advance and at entrances.
- Mandatory use of masks or scarfs covering mouths and noses for the entire time in church buildings. Worship leaders with speaking roles may remove masks only while speaking. No live singing with exception of vocalist with mask and microphone.
- No touching others outside one's household during any portion of service.
- For offerings, online and regular electronic giving are encouraged. Offering plates may be placed on a table near the entrance and other access points for in-person gathering.
- For Eucharist, no distribution of wine via common cup or intinction. Only the celebrant consumes the consecrated host and wine. After the invitation to Communion, only pre-consecrated wafers to be distributed, (the wafers having been consecrated previously by the celebrant wearing a mask). Receiving Communion in one-kind only (wafer) is a full expression of the Sacrament. If desired, congregations may use single use disposable cups for wine.
- Communicants may come forward in a single line to receive standing (no kneeling at the altar rail). Wafers and communion cups are to be distributed by the presider and Eucharistic ministers wearing gloves, or by placing elements on the table or altar for people to pick up themselves.
- Holy water basins and baptismal fonts must be emptied during this period.
- No live coffee hours, potluck meals, or after-church social gatherings are permitted.
- In addition to making hand sanitizers widely available, churches must obtain cleansing tissues and wipe down all door knobs and handles before and after each church service.
- Baptisms and anointing of the sick are permitted, at the discretion of cleric's comfort level and using gloves and masks.
- Weddings, funerals are permitted complying with other worship guidelines. No food receptions allowed.
- Pastoral care is to be administered via telephone or video conferencing only except with permission of the bishop.

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Other building use:

- Staff may return to the office, but remote working is still encouraged. Guidelines for social distancing, and cleaning and disinfecting, apply. Masks are necessary in shared areas.
- Groups may gather following guidelines for this phase: social distancing, mandatory mask use, cleaning and disinfecting before and after are required.
- Schools may resume only in accordance with public health guidelines.

Phase Three:

Moderately-limited In-person Public Worship Services and Property

Civic authorities continue to ease restrictions on public gatherings.

Numbers of known infections and deaths have fallen to near zero in the state or district. Widespread testing and tracking.

Worship:

- Those known to be infectious, actively sick or symptomatic are still not to attend.
- Masks are optional.
- Singing may resume.
- Eucharistic guidelines may be relaxed.
- In-person social hours with light refreshments may be offered with professionally prepared and packaged food products (no home-prepared food).
- All sanitization practices are still in effect.
- Baptisms are permitted at cleric's and family's discretion and comfort level.
- Weddings, funerals, anointing are permitted at cleric's and family's discretion and comfort level. Receptions must use professionally prepared and packaged food products.
- Pastoral care may be in person using masks and gloves with persons with any communicable disease.
- COVID-19 signage remains in place.

Other building use:

- Congregational gatherings and outside groups may resume within guidelines established by civic authorities.
- Masks are optional.
- Sanitation practices are still in effect.

Staff:

- May return and are not required to wear masks or maintain social distancing. Accommodations still encouraged for high-risk persons.

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Phase Four:

All Live In-Person Public Worship Services Allowed with Few Limitations

Civic authorities have allowed all public gatherings.

An antiviral has been developed and is widely available.

No reported new cases of pandemic infections in the state for at least two weeks. Widespread testing and tracking.

Worship:

- Those known to be infectious, actively sick or symptomatic are not to attend.
- Acolytes no longer need to wipe down the altar rail after each round of worshipers have been communicated.
- Holy water basins and baptismal fonts may be refilled.
- The Passing of the Peace may resume. Words, hugs and fist & elbow touching are allowed--but no handshakes.
- Offerings may be collected as the congregation chooses.
- For Eucharistic celebrations, traditional practices may resume, and wine can be distributed to all who desire it, except that worshipers may not intinct (dipping the bread into the cup). If intinction is desired, the clergy distributing bread or a eucharistic server dips the wafer into the consecrated wine and places it on the tongue of the worshiper.
- Baptism and other sacramental rites have no restrictions except for those diagnosed or symptomatic with COVID-19.
- In-person coffee hours, potluck meals, and community building times may resume.
- In addition to making hand sanitizers widely available, churches should still wipe down all door knobs and handles before and after each church service.
- No restrictions on pastoral care visits, except the use of masks and gloves still required for any diagnosed or symptomatic COVID-19 persons.

Other building use:

- Can return to full use, but accommodations are still encouraged for high-risk persons. No restrictions except for people who are showing signs of possible infection.

These guidelines are developed in accordance with recommendations of the:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Protection](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Episcopal Relief and Development](#)
- [Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine](#)

And in compliance with federal, [State of Maryland](#), and [District of Columbia](#) policies.

Guidance on disinfecting:

[Specific guidance from the CDC on preparing for regular disinfecting after regathering](#)
[EPA guidance on disinfecting products](#)