



## Diocese of Maryland COVID-19 Response Guidelines and Parameters

Individual congregations can seek permission to move from phase to phase depending on local circumstance. The bishop may move a congregation back to an earlier phase if local circumstance risk factors change and merit such action. These guidelines remain in effect and will change only as local conditions require.

### **Red Phase: Suspension of Live In-person Public Worship Services and Public Use of Property**

Public Health Indicators: Civic authorities shut down all public gatherings and numbers of known infections and deaths rising or near peak levels in state.

#### ***Worship:***

- Congregations encouraged to offer online worship
- Services live-streamed using as few persons as necessary and all wearing masks except when speaking
- No singing except pre-recorded music or a single cantor standing at least 20 feet away from next-closest person
- For Eucharists, no distribution of Holy Sacrament either live or virtually; celebrants may consume elements on behalf of congregation
- Online social gathering and community building encouraged

#### ***Other property use:***

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

#### ***Staff:***

- Strongly encouraged to work remotely. Essential reasons for coming into church offices include processing mail, checks, bills and payroll, and setting up for live-streaming. Further accommodations made for high-risk persons

### **Orange Phase: Significantly-limited Live In-person Public Use of Property**

Public Health Indicators: Civic authorities allow for limited numbers of persons to gather and numbers of known infections and deaths have fallen substantially in the region. Numbers of known infections and deaths have declined in the county for fourteen (14) consecutive days.

#### ***Worship:***



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- In conjunction with online services, limited number of worshipers may gather for in-person worship inside or outside. Number of worshipers dependent upon modified seating capacity to allow social distancing by household and by restrictions of local jurisdiction
- Copies of *Covenant for Regathering* available in advance and at entrances
- Mandatory use of masks or scarfs covering mouths and noses for entire time in church buildings. Worship leaders with speaking role may remove mask only while speaking
- Worshipers known to be diagnosed with COVID-19, actively sick or symptomatic are not to attend or must leave immediately. Worshipers with underlying health risks are discouraged from attending service
- No choirs or congregational singing allowed indoors or outdoors. Churches may allow, however, for one masked cantor who is at least 20 feet away from other worshipers to sing alone on the congregation's behalf. Other worshipers may mouth the word silently or hum while hymns and psalms are sung by the cantor. A single cantor may remain unmasked for singing only if the service has no more than ten people present (such as for livestreaming only).
- No touching others outside one's household during any portion of service
- Offerings: online and regular electronic giving encouraged. Offering plate placed on table near entrance and other access points for in-person gathering. Counters use gloves, masks and maintain minimum social distance
- For Eucharist, no distribution of wine. Only celebrant consumes host and wine. After Invitation to Communion, only wafers to be distributed, (the wafers having been consecrated by celebrant wearing mask). Communicants may come forward to receive standing only and continue to maintain social distancing. Only disposable paper containers may be used to distribute individual wafers; no plastic is allowed (except for Concordia pre-packaged which may be used no more than once per month)
- Holy water basins and baptismal fonts must be emptied during this period
- No live coffee hours, potluck meals, or live community building times allowed
- In addition to making hand sanitizers widely available, churches must disinfect all doorknobs and door handles before and after each church service
- Emergency baptism and anointing only, at discretion of cleric's comfort level and using gloves and masks
- Weddings, funerals comply with other worship guidelines. No food receptions allowed
- Pastoral care administered via telephone or video conferencing only; face to face allowable with permission

### ***Other building use:***

- Groups may gather following guidelines for this phase: social distancing, mandatory mask use, cleaning and disinfecting before and after
- COVID-19 signage at primary entrances and restrooms
- Restrooms to be used one person at a time
- Schools may resume following guidelines for this phase

### ***Staff:***

- Staff may return to office, but remote working still encouraged. Guidelines for social distancing and cleaning and disinfecting apply. Mask use only necessary in shared areas; not necessary in individual office area



**Yellow Phase: Moderately-limited In-person Public Worship Services and Property Use**

Public Health Indicators: Vaccine has been developed to effectively prevent spread of disease and/or testing to detect disease widely available. 7-day average positivity rate for known infections and deaths remains below three percent (state data in local jurisdiction) for at least four weeks. Widespread testing and tracking. Hospital bed usage and death rate per capita remains low.

**Worship:**

- Social distancing still required
- People who are COVID-19 positive, actively sick or symptomatic are still not to attend
- Masks still mandatory indoors but not outdoors if social distancing can be maintained for situations where people do not move once mask is removed (once seated)
- Congregational singing still not allowed, indoors or outdoors
- Masked ensemble singing may begin (limit to four singers and other restrictions apply)
- All Eucharistic guidelines of Orange Phase still in effect
- All sanitizing practices still in effect
- Baptisms permitted at cleric's and family's discretion and comfort level
- Weddings, funerals, anointing permitted at cleric's and family's discretion and comfort level
- Receptions using professionally prepared and packaged food products
- Pastoral care may be in person using mask and gloves with persons with any communicable disease

**Other building use:**

- COVID-19 signage remains in place
- Masks required indoors but not outdoors if social distancing can be maintained for situations where people do not move once mask is removed (e.g., outdoor classrooms)
- Multi-stall restroom use may resume
- Food and beverage use still limited to professionally prepared and packaged food products

**Staff:**

- Mask use and social distancing continue. Accommodations still encouraged for high-risk persons

**Green Phase: All Live In-Person Public Worship Services Allowed with Few Limitations**

Public Health Indicators: Vaccine is demonstrably effective, widely available and distributed to at least 75% of population. Civic authorities have allowed all public gatherings. New reported cases of pandemic infections in the state remain low. Widespread testing and tracking.

**Worship:**

- Those who are COVID-19 positive, actively sick or symptomatic are still not to attend
- Masks are optional
- Social distancing not required, but accommodations still made for those who wish to be distanced



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- Contact tracing no longer necessary
  - Congregational singing is allowed
  - 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 should be not extend beyond a few minutes. Words, hugs and fist & elbow touching are allowed – but no handshakes
  - Offerings may be collected as the congregation chooses, using a variety of means
  - 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, a eucharistic server follows the clergy person distributing the bread, and that server alone 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 with COVID-19 or who are symptomatic
  - In-person coffee hours, served meals, and community building times may resume. Food and beverages may not be distributed as self-serve; designated servers will hand serving food onto plates
  - In addition to making hand sanitizers widely available, churches should still wipe down all doorknobs 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

### **End of Phases: No Restrictions on Live In-Person Public Worship Services**

Public Health Indicators: Pandemic is considered over. State positivity rate remains below 0.25 percent for at least one month

- No accommodations for social distancing necessary
- No restrictions on food and beverages
- No requirements for extra cleaning and disinfecting practices
- Handshaking allowed

### ***Other building use:***

- No restrictions except for people who are showing signs of possible infection

### ***Staff:***

- Can return fully, but accommodations are still encouraged for high risk persons

These guidelines are developed in accordance with recommendations of the [Center for Disease Control](#), the [World Health Organization](#), [Episcopal Relief and Development](#), and [Johns Hopkins University of Medicine](#) and in compliance with federal and [State of Maryland](#) policies.



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### ***For specific guidance on preparing for regular disinfecting after regathering:***

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

### ***EPA guidance on disinfecting products:***

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

### ***EPA guidance on indoor air quality:***

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/additional-measures-address-covid-19-public-indoor-spaces>

### ***Training for ushers (and/or greeters):***

- Before worship, entrance doors are to be propped open if possible. All door knobs and restroom light switches disinfected
- Bulletins placed near entrances for congregants to pick up themselves
- Door handles disinfected repeatedly and consistently
- Make sure hand sanitizer available
- Keep track of number of participants to ensure maximum capacity not violated
- No open seating. Guide people (while social distancing) to available seats, keeping in mind size of household
- Ask people displaying symptomatic behavior to leave
- Used bulletins not reused for subsequent services
- Door handles and other contact surfaces cleaned and disinfected after
- Checklists printed and maintained as record for liability purposes. A **sample disinfecting checklist** is listed below

### ***Signage:***

- “STOP and help us stay safe. Do not enter property if you have been exposed recently to someone with Covid-19 or if you are experiencing symptoms.” signs displayed at all public entrances

### ***Seating Capacity:***

- Expect normal seating capacity to be reduced to 15-25 percent capacity depending upon architectural layout. Calculate based on an average household unit of two being able to sit together with minimum of six feet to the next closest person
- Pews are spaced every 33-36", so typically only every other pew will be usable
- Seating clusters of two per household can be assumed when determining capacity
- Aisle access does not necessarily have to maintain six feet from seated congregants as long as that proximity is brief while people are moving in aisle

### ***Approved Communion Distribution Practices:***



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- Wafers only, consecrated on tray(s) in individual disposable paper pill cups or placed at least one inch apart on a corporal or purificator. Altar guild prepares cups. Celebrant remains masked for prayer of consecration and/or wafers remained covered during the consecrations to prevent contamination. Tray(s) placed on altar during consecration and moved to separate table in front of altar for distribution
- Wafers only, consecrated in ciborium or other container and distributed by cleric after prayer of consecration using hand sanitizer and gloves to drop into individual cupped hands as congregants come forward six feet apart
- Congregants maintain masks except to briefly consume wafer by slipping it in mouth from bottom of mask
- Congregants can wait to consume until all have received the wafer in the hand and all have returned to seats, at which time the cleric would say, "The Body of Christ..." and all would receive simultaneously "as one"
- Drive-by distribution may be performed by cleric at end of service for those who participated virtually but are not ready to enter the church interior
- Concordia-brand disposable wafer/wine cups allowable once per month
- Contact [regather@EpiscopalMaryland.org](mailto:regather@EpiscopalMaryland.org) to seek approval for other adaptive practices

### ***Midweek property use:***

- Staff wash hands regularly. Door knobs and other contact surfaces cleaned at least twice a day
- Rooms used by church or outside groups cleaned before and after use
- Outside groups given copies of *Covenant for Regathering Outside Groups* and asked to comply
- Outside groups trained to disinfect and provided sufficient supplies to do so



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Sample  
**DISINFECTING CHECKLIST:**  
(in chronological order of treatment)

**List of touch surfaces to be disinfected for Sunday worship:**

- Door to women's restroom
- Light switches in women's restroom
- Faucet handles in women's restroom
- Stall doors and toilet handles
- Door to men's restroom
- Light switches in men's restroom
- Faucet handles in men's restroom
- Stall doors and toilet handles
- Altar rail
- Backs of pews
- Pew cushions of used areas
- Light switch(es) for worship space
- Interior door to nave
- Light switches for narthex
- Entrance door handles (outside and inside)

Date:

Time of day completed:

Name:

Signature:



## **Covenant for Regathering**

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, I promise, with God's help and to the best of my ability, to abide by the guidelines of the Diocese of Maryland for participation in the life of my congregation according to the regathering phase in which my congregation is authorized to carry out its mission and ministry.

In fulfillment of the Baptismal Covenant (*BCP* p. 304-305), I will strive to:

Love my neighbor as myself, so I will...

- Wear a mask or scarf over my nose and mouth at all times in church buildings, except momentarily to receive the sacrament or lead worship through an assigned speaking part, and follow public health guidelines for hand sanitizing and disinfecting
- Only attend worship and receive communion if I am non-symptomatic for the COVID-19 virus or any other transmittable disease that could compromise the health of another congregant
- Will abstain from attending if doing so would put me at greater risk due to my own health status





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Respect the dignity of every human being, so I will...

- Make no physical contact with people beyond the members of my own household
- Maintain a six foot or more distance from other members of the congregation
- Respect any requests for distance, masking, and cleaning, to ensure the safety and comfort level of others

Seek and serve Christ in all people, so I will...

- Trust and support the decisions of both my diocesan and congregational leaders
- Stay connected with others in my community by telephone, video chat, or mail