

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CHICAGO

A NEW SEASON

Guidelines for Re-Entering
Our Church Buildings

VERSION 3 | JANUARY 20, 2021

Returning to Our Churches: A Framework & A Plan

The Diocese of Chicago's plan for re-opening our churches was developed after consultation with diocesan leaders and other dioceses across the Episcopal Church. It is based in large measure on meeting public health criteria spelled out in [Restore Illinois](#), the state's five-phase plan to guide its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The diocesan plan includes guidelines for resuming in-person worship on or after June 1, 2020. It is possible, however, that a resurgence in infections may require us, at some point, to return to the guidelines in effect until May 31, so those are included in this document as well.

These guidelines will assist you in developing a reopening plan that must be [submitted to the bishop's office](#) before worship services may resume in your church building. Please pay particular attention to the appendices which include helpful questions and checklists.

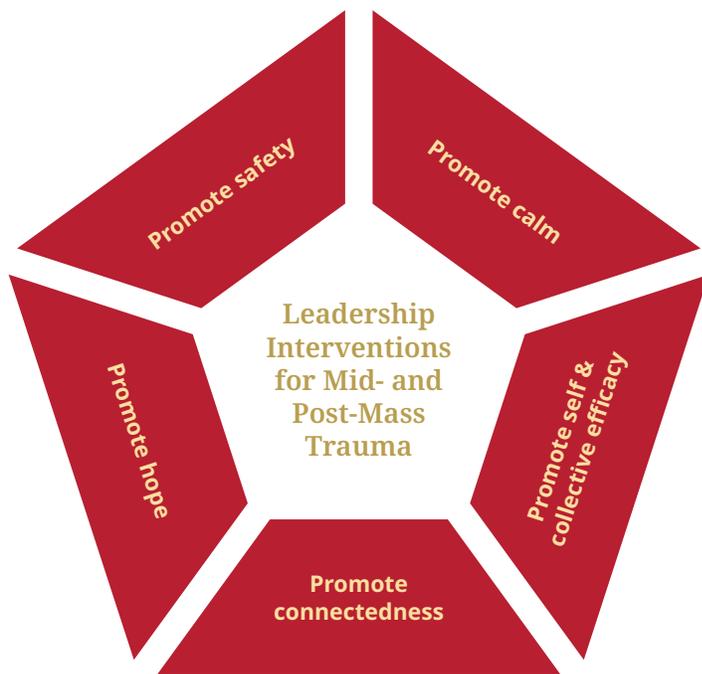
Once your plan is approved, you may reopen for worship and other activities as specified by these guidelines. The level of activity permissible in your congregation is tied to your region's progress in the statewide recovery plan. Please consult [this map](#) to determine the region in which your congregation is located, and [these tables](#) if you are uncertain which "phase" of the statewide plan prevails in your region.

There may be instances in which the bishop determines that the diocese should move with greater caution than the state during the pandemic. You will be notified if that occurs.

Please understand that re-opening your churches at this time is not mandatory. The health and safety of the members of this diocese, our leaders and our employees remain our primary concern. Take your time as a community in working through these guidelines and proceed at a pace that is comfortable for you.

Remember, too, that many people—particularly those over 65, and those with medical conditions that make them especially vulnerable to the virus—may not be returning to our churches any time soon. If your congregation is offering online worship, it is essential that you continue to do so.

Although this is a difficult time in the life of our diocese and our world, there are, nonetheless, values and objectives that our leaders can promote. The Rev. Ellen Ekevag identified five such objectives in a [recent presentation](#) to diocesan clergy, and we invite you to consider them as you begin to consider reopening your church.



*Leadership framework developed by the Rev. Ellen Ekevag using source materials from Hobfoll, S. E., Watson, P., Bell, C. C., Bryant, R. A., Brymer, M. J., Friedman, M. J., et al. (2007). Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. *Psychiatry*, 70(4), 283-315.*

As you implement new practices and protocols, ask the questions:

1. How is this action promoting safety?
2. How is this action promoting calm?
3. How is this action promoting self and collective efficacy?
4. How is this action promoting connectedness?
5. How is this action promoting hope?

At all stages of reopening:

1. Protect staff and congregants who are at higher risk for severe illness by encouraging them to participate virtually.
2. Educate all entities/groups using your facilities about the guidelines and the importance of following them.
3. Particularly after June 1, 2020 when limited in-person worship is allowed in regions operating in Phase 3 or higher, no clergy, other minister, staff, or volunteers should feel forced to be present. Exercising care and caution for those at risk, or who care for those at risk, is essential.
4. If your congregation offers day care or preschool programs, follow state/local and CDC guidance for such programs.
5. Train all clergy and staff in these new practices.

6. Plan for when a staff member or congregant becomes sick. The Chicago Public Health Department has provided guidance [on its website](#).
7. Within the framework of the guidelines, leaders of congregations should ask: What makes sense for our congregation in our context? No one size fits all.
8. Pay attention to the public health trends and indicators in your own county/region.
9. Following these guidelines and the guidelines of the State of Illinois as they pertain to your region helps mitigate liability. There is no absolute immunity from liability.
10. Seek help and input when you need it.
11. Remember, there is no perfect plan. Yours will evolve and change to adapt to new realities on the ground.

CHURCH GUIDELINES THROUGH MAY 31, 2020

Be aware that we may need to revert to the first five of these guidelines should there be a resurgence of infections in the diocese. You will be notified if this is the case.

- Church buildings remain closed.
- Conduct worship virtually based on your local context and practice.
- No in-person pastoral visits.
- Perform essential outreach ministries using safety protocols (social distancing, mask wearing, limited number of volunteers and staff).
- Continue virtual meetings, formation and other programs.
- Begin to make plans for re-opening of church buildings. Cleaning crews or other maintenance workers can enter building. Re-opening steps can be found in Appendix 1 [on page 9](#) of this document.

CHURCH GUIDELINES BEGINNING JUNE 1, 2020

Bishop Lee decided that congregations in our diocese may return to their buildings on June 1. Unless a surge in new cases returns the state, or parts of it, to Phase 1, we expect all congregations to be in regions that are in Phase 2 or 3 of the state's recovery plan by that date. The state's guidelines permit gatherings of no more than 10 during Phases 2 and 3, and specify guidelines for three tiers of gathering size during Phase 4. However, certain practices should be observed in Phases 2-4, regardless of the number of people assembled. They are as follows:

- Clergy and other liturgical assistants (we urge 5 or fewer if your region is in Phase 2 of the state's plan, and no more than 10 at any point during Phases 2 and 3) may return to church buildings for virtual worship services no earlier than June 1, 2020 as long as re-opening procedures are completed. All safety guidelines must be followed.
- Follow the worship guidelines in Appendix 2 [on page 11](#) of this document.

- No live singing is allowed – congregational, choir, or solo. Continue to use instrumental, except for wind instruments, and recorded music. [This video provides](#) more information about congregational singing and risk of infection.
- Maintain at least 6 feet between all persons who do not live in the same household.
- Wear facial coverings (e.g. masks, bandanas, scarfs).
- Follow the building re-opening steps [in Appendix 1](#), which include cleaning and sanitizing guidelines.
- Maintain good personal hygiene including hand washing, sanitizing and not touching face.
- Direct that any staff or congregant displaying symptoms of COVID-19, as well as people who have had close contact with a person who has symptoms of COVID-19 refrain from participating in any aspect of in-person services or activities.
- Submit checklist to bishop's office using this form in Appendix 3 [on page 13](#).

OTHER GUIDELINES WHILE YOUR REGION IS IN PHASE 2

- In-person pastoral visits are discouraged except with individuals who are dying or critically ill. Continue telephonic and other virtual pastoral care.
- Perform essential outreach ministries using safety guidelines with limited numbers of staff and volunteers.
- Continue virtual meetings, formation and other programs.

Movement from Phase 2 to Phase 3 may occur on a regional basis as directed by State of Illinois officials. Please be aware that criteria for City of Chicago are more stringent than those of State of Illinois, so churches in the city may progress to new phases at a pace different from those in other municipalities.

OTHER GUIDELINES WHILE YOUR REGION IS IN PHASE 3

- Clergy and other liturgical assistants (10 or fewer) may continue providing only virtual worship from churches using all safety guidelines AND/OR
- Churches may worship on Sundays or any weekday in groups of no more than 10 as long as all safety guidelines are observed. Ten people includes the altar party and congregation.
- Follow the worship guidelines in Appendix 2 [on page 11](#) of this document.
- Outdoor worship is also permitted using these same guidelines.
- Virtual worship options should be continued for those who are unable to attend.
- Coffee hour is discouraged and only allowed if safety guidelines can be maintained. No shared communal food or beverages are allowed.

- No live singing is allowed - congregational, choir, or solo. Continue to use recorded and instrumental music, except for wind instruments.
- Weddings, funerals, and Quinceañeras with a total group size of no more than 10 are allowed with observation of all safety guidelines.
- Baptism and Eucharist are allowed with modified rubrics as addressed in guidance on worshipping together (see [Appendix 2](#)).
- Churches may be open for personal prayer as long as physical distancing and frequent cleaning and sanitation of space is taking place.
- In-person pastoral visits may resume to low-risk parishioners, utilizing safety practices.
- Church offices may open as long as physical distancing is possible and appropriate cleaning and disinfecting is taking place. Work from home is strongly encouraged when possible.
- Limited day care programs may open with Illinois Department of Public Health approved safety guidance. (The diocese will publish these when available.) Childcare, church schools and youth programs remain closed.
- Perform essential outreach ministries using safety guidelines and limited number of volunteers or staff present.
- Small group ministries or meetings may gather in-person with 10 or few people utilizing safety guidelines.
- Continue virtual options for larger meetings, children's formation, youth groups and other larger programs.

OTHER GUIDELINES WHILE YOUR REGION IS IN TIERS 1-3 OF RESURGENCE MITIGATION

In July 2020, the governor announced three tiers of "resurgence" mitigation measures that include three phases that precede movement to Phase 4. [Learn more on the Illinois Department of Public Health website.](#)

The State of Illinois monitors key indicators daily to identify early but significant increases of COVID-19 transmission. These include positivity rate, hospitalizations for COVID-19, and hospital bed/ICU bed availability. These indicators can be used to determine whether additional community mitigation measures are needed within a particular region to further control the spread of COVID-19. The following guidelines apply for in-person worship and other gatherings when a region moves into any of the three tiers.

Tier 1: In-person worship or other gatherings limited to 25 people or 25% of capacity whichever is LESS.

Tier 2: in-person worship or other gatherings limited to 10 people.

Change
from
Version 2

Tier 3: suspension of in-person worship and other gatherings. Live streaming or recording services in church buildings may continue, but may include a maximum of 10 people, and only those required to assist with essential tasks.

In all of these tiers, essential ministries such as food pantries, may continue to operate.

OTHER GUIDELINES WHILE YOUR REGION IS IN PHASE 4

Unless specifically updated here, all other guidelines remain in effect.

For in-person worship or other church activities, the following guidelines apply:

- Face coverings and physical distancing remain the norm.
- Return to all outreach ministries as long as in line with health guidance.
- **State of IL (except Chicago):** Attendance at in-person worship or other church activities is limited to 25% of capacity with maximum of 100 attendees, whichever is lower and as long as social distancing is maintained. (e.g. sanctuary capacity of 100 would allow for 25 attendees while capacity of 500 would allow for 100)
- **City of Chicago:** Attendance at in-person worship or other church activities is limited to 25% capacity with maximum attendance of 50 attendees, whichever is lower, as long as social distancing is maintained.
- Drive-in services allowed following guidelines issued by State of Illinois and City of Chicago
 - » Congregants remain in vehicle at all times
 - » Maintain distance between cars (6 feet or more)
 - » No exchange of materials between leaders and attendees.
- As able, continue offering online services for those who can't attend.
- In-person singing is not allowed.
- Outdoor services are allowed using same guidelines.
- All liturgical guidelines for the Diocese remain the same.
- Youth programs, church school, nursery and pre-schools may reopen with Department of Public Health approved safety guidance.

State of Illinois guidance: <http://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/community-guidance/places-worship-guidance>

City of Chicago guidance: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/reopening-business-portal/business-guidelines.html> (click on the Arts & Culture section and then scroll to bottom of web page for Places of Worship)

Movement from Phase 4 to Phase 5 may occur on a regional basis as directed by State of Illinois officials.

PHASE 5

Under state guidelines, Phase 5 cannot begin until a vaccine or highly effective treatment is widely available or until the state has eliminated new cases over a sustained period.

- All size gatherings allowed.
- Continued virtual worship and meetings options provided.

RESOURCES

[Preparedness for Sacred Spaces](#)

[Restoring Illinois Plan](#)

¹ Adapted from Diocese of Missouri, “Updated Guidance for Clergy and Congregations in the Diocese of Missouri,” May 1, 2020.

APPENDIX I

Questions, Checklist and Guidelines for Re-entering Our Buildings

- Vestry/Bishop's Committee meets to discuss re-entry guidelines, create plan for re-opening, and a timeline for execution. Any plan should include ongoing opportunities for evaluation. Below is a helpful list of questions¹ leaders should consider before re-opening:
 - » How will you maintain online worship when in-person worship is also taking place?
 - » How many people can your worship space accommodate if family groups must sit 6 feet apart?
 - » How will you discourage people from greeting the preacher and celebrant or congregating after worship services?
 - » How will you cap attendance at services and events while still making it possible for visitors to join you?
 - » What should be done with small groups who are meeting online? Should you shift them to meet in person when church buildings reopen?
 - » How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection in regards to the following:
 - Worship bulletin disposal
 - Areas where small groups gather during the week
 - Nurseries and/or playgrounds (when re-opened)
 - Pews or chairs following worship
 - Doorknobs, bathrooms and other high-touch objects and areas?
 - » How will you update your building use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
 - » If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation, particularly members who may have come into contact with that individual, while still honoring the individual's privacy and providing pastoral care?
 - » If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
 - » How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?
- Prior to re-entering buildings, all common spaces in the worship space should be thoroughly cleaned. Consider removing all non-essential items from all rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch. Professional cleaning is recommended for initial cleaning. Please contact the Bishop's office if this is a financial hardship.

- » [CDC Guidelines for Cleaning Your Facility](#)
- » [Sanitizing Office Spaces](#)
- Follow [EPA recommendations for water supply flushing](#) for reopening of buildings
- Remove prayer books, hymnals, bibles, pens, information cards, etc. from pews.
- Determine physical layout of spaces such as narthex, nave, sacristy, vesting areas, etc. to maintain physical distancing and overall safety. Determine entering and exiting plans. Review other emergency plans (fire, weather emergency, etc.)
- Post signs about physical distancing, maximum occupancy, hand washing, wearing of facial coverings, non-contact greetings and refraining from shaking hands or hugging. [Free signs from CDC](#)
- Bathrooms must be used by one person at a time (or parent-child when assistance is needed). Create signage and assure adequate signage and disinfectant supplies for each bathroom.
- Provide hand sanitizer, tissues and waste baskets in convenient locations. If possible, have face coverings available for those who forget theirs or for visitors.
- Plan for ongoing cleaning and disinfecting church between services. See links above.
- Train clergy, staff and volunteers (especially greeters, altar guild, readers) in new procedures.
- Communicate with your congregation about the preparations that you have done for their arrival. Remind them that if they are sick, they should stay home and join online instead.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

[Preparedness for Sacred Spaces](#)

[CPG Safety Tips for Religious Organizations](#)

APPENDIX 2

Worship Guidelines for Reopening

Coming back together into our church buildings to record or livestream a service or to worship in-person can be both an exciting and anxiety-producing time. Beginning on June 1, Bishop Lee gave permission to churches in regions of the state that were operating under Phase 2 and 3 of the state's reopening plan, to gather in groups of 10 or fewer. At this time, it is especially important to remember that the need of the congregation and its leaders to feel safe is paramount. For Phase 4 guidelines, when groups up to 50 may be permitted, please consult [Appendix 1, Questions, Checklist and Guidelines for Re-entering Our Buildings](#).

WORSHIP SERVICES

- Consider continuing the use of Morning Prayer or Liturgy of the Word through the Prayers of the People as your primary service.
- If celebrating the Eucharist, please adhere to the guidelines below.
- Greetings and Passing of the Peace must remain touch-free with maintenance of physical distance.
- All clergy, liturgical leaders and congregants must wear face coverings throughout the service.
- Avoid passing a collection plate and offer stationary collection boxes for offerings. Continue online giving options.
- Have greeters hold doors open to avoid touching of door handles and knobs.
- Keep church doors open as able to allow for air flow and ventilation.
- Children present at services should remain with their parents and guardians and avoid congregating or interacting with children of other families.

FOR PRIESTS CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST

- Bread and wine should be brought to the table by the presider. Presider sets their own table and only presider should be at table.
- Pour only a small amount of wine in chalice to be consumed at end of service when unused hosts are consumed.
- Use hosts instead of homemade bread. Use small presider host.
- Only have presider host directly in front of you during consecration. Have ciborium of hosts for congregants to the side and consider covering the elements being consecrated.
- Think through how you will minimize person-to-person contact for administering the sacrament; how you will sanitize and re-sanitize before and while administering the sacrament; and how you will orchestrate your movements. Please remember that

according to The Book of Common Prayer rubrics, consecration can be accomplished with a minimum of gestures and touching of elements.

- Create directional signage and instructions for how to receive communion.
- Communicants should receive host while still wearing mask and consume host as they return to their seats.

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

- The service of Baptism should proceed as normal through the blessing of the water. The presider can bless the water but should not touch the water as the rubrics say.
- In the spirit of the BCP provision for Emergency Baptism (BCP, p. 313), Bishop Lee recommended that parents both administer the water and anoint their child.
- Following the baptism, the presider continues with the welcome of the newly baptized (BCP, p. 308).

CELEBRATIONS OF WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

- Weddings and funerals may be held in the church as long as the guidelines appropriate to the current phase of a region's reopening are followed.
- All worship guidelines pertaining to music, worship bulletins, celebration of the Eucharist, etc. are to be maintained.

APPENDIX 3

Verification of Completion of Plan for Re-entry

Vestry/Bishop's Committee has met and agreed to a plan for re-opening, and a timeline for execution.

PREPARING/CLEANING/DISINFECTING

All common spaces in the worship space have been thoroughly cleaned/or plan is in place before first service.

Plans for ongoing cleaning and sanitizing between services and at end of day are in place. Plans for ongoing cleaning and disinfecting church between services are in place.

Adequate time between services for cleaning and disinfecting is planned.

All non-essential items have been removed from all rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.

Per EPA recommendations, water supply has been flushed.

COMMON SPACES & FURNISHINGS

Prayer books, hymnals, bibles, pens, information cards, etc. have been removed from pews. Plan for distribution of worship bulletins and disposal of bulletins is in place.

Completed review and rearrangement, if needed, of physical layout of spaces such as narthex, nave, sacristy, vesting areas, etc. to maintain physical distancing and overall safety. Clearly delineated markings for how physical distancing is maintained between individuals or family groups.

Bathrooms have signage indicating one-at-a-time usage only. Supplies available in bathrooms for quick disinfecting (disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer). Signage about personal hygiene (handwashing, disposing of any trash).

SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Hand sanitizer, tissues and waste baskets are accessible and in convenient locations.

Face coverings are available for those who do not have them.

MEMBER/VISITOR AWARENESS & COMMUNICATION

Entry and exiting plans created.



Plan created to assure compliance with maximum number of people allowed.

Signage about physical distancing, entering, exiting, maximum occupancy, hand washing, wearing of facial coverings, non-contact greetings and refraining from shaking hands or hugging is visible and posted.

Congregation is aware of plans for their return and also know to stay home if they are sick or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

Plan in place if member of congregation or visitor becomes infected with COVID-19.

Plan in place if member or visitor is ill.

Plan in place for someone who refuses to wear a face covering.

Training has been provided to clergy, staff, and volunteers (especially greeters, altar guild, readers) in new procedures.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Plans for maintaining remote/online services are in place.

If applicable, procedures for celebrating the Eucharist are in place.

Worship bulletins have clear instructions about procedures and guidelines for entering and exiting space, greeting and passing of peace, reception of communion (if applicable), and wearing of face coverings.

Collection boxes are accessible for pledges and donations.

Families celebrating baptisms, wedding, funerals and Quinceañeras are aware of guidelines and will commit to adhering to them.

We are committed to following and communicating the guidelines we have established.

Congregation

Rector/Vicar/Priest-in-Charge

Warden

Warden

Date

SUBMIT FORM

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