



EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN CONNECTICUT
PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

LIVING WITH COVID-19

Protocols and Directions for Clergy and Vestries in the
Episcopal Church in Connecticut

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**FIRST PHASE
MAY 2020**

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12:24b-27 (NRSV)

Dear Companions in Christ:

Grace to you and peace in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We write to you at a time of transition as we continue to live in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. On Friday, May 8 Governor Ned Lamont shared his plans for the initial phase of reopening Connecticut beginning after May 20th. As a result we are called to reassess our current protocols and directions with respect to the closure of our church buildings and restrictions on in-person worship.

We find ourselves entering new terrain, though the journey has not changed; we are still called to join God in God's mission of restoration and reconciliation. Ensuring that we do all we can to help our communities heal and be made whole in the wake of COVID-19 is about the mission of God. Care for the Body of Christ and for our towns and cities requires that our parishes and worshipping communities across the Episcopal Church in Connecticut continue to participate actively in slowing the spread of COVID-19 and also work to minimize potential future waves of infection and death.

On April 30 the Governor presented four levels of precautions related to the reopening of businesses and organizations with Level Four being the most restrictive ([see here](#).) On May 8 he outlined detailed plans for the initial, most restrictive, phase of opening restaurants, offices, retail stores, and personal service businesses beginning after May 20 ([see here](#) and [here](#).) The Governor did not address Houses of Worship in his plans for this initial phase of reopening. That, however, does not preclude us from offering protocols and directions with respect to in-person worship and the opening of church offices following May 20.

We believe that parishes and worshipping communities in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut should not return to in-person worship during this initial phase of reopening, which is anticipated to last at least until June 20. Our rationale is two-fold. First, we must do everything in our power to protect and care for those who are weak and vulnerable in our parishes and in our neighborhoods. Refraining from in-person gatherings during this initial phase of reopening is a responsible pastoral and civic response.

Second, the Governor has asked that individuals who are 65 years or older continue to stay home and stay safe after May 20. Given that a large percentage of our parishioners and many of our clergy are 65 years old or older, it simply does not make sense to try and push the envelope by trying to have in-person worship during this initial reopening time.

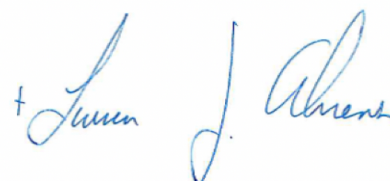
Below you will find detailed protocols and directions for parishes and worshipping communities who, contrary to our wishes, might be considering in-person worship and/or reopening church offices during this initial, most restrictive, phase of reopening. A word on the authority of these directions is in order. Canon III.9.6(a)(1) of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church directs that "the Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop." Further Canon I, Section 8 of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut says "the property and business affairs of the Parish shall be subject to the direction, management, and control of the Vestry...". These canons imply a shared authority between the Bishops, Rector/Priest-in-Charge, and Vestry that is fundamentally relational and collaborative with respect to both worship and the management of church buildings. The protocols and directions below are offered in that same spirit of shared, relational authority. As your bishops, we assure you that we are available to you and your parishes as together we discern the safest and most pastorally appropriate way forward for the parishes and worshipping communities of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. We and the staff of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut are here to help.

We thank you for your continued faithfulness and dedication to God's mission in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a privilege and honor to serve alongside you in this time of COVID-19. We trust in the truth of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and know that that life will triumph over death. God bless you.

Faithfully yours,



The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Diocesan



The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens
Bishop Suffragan

General Protocols in the First Phase of Reopening Connecticut

- Continue to keep church buildings closed for in-person worship.
- Keep church office use limited to essential operations with proper sanitization and precautions in place.
- Continue to hold online/virtual worship and/or continue provisions for worship at home.
- Video recording and/or online worship from church buildings/worship spaces continues to be limited to five people practicing physical distancing and wearing facemasks.
- For parishes that are not currently providing services online, consider finding the assistance needed to develop this capacity, or join online worship with nearby parishes. Consult your Region Missionary to learn what is happening in nearby parishes.
- Forums, bible studies, vestry meetings, committee meetings and other gatherings continue online.
- Building use by outside groups and/or renters determined on a case-by-case basis, considering the current protocols for numbers, social distancing, and sanitizing.

Directions for Those Considering In-Person Worship Indoors or Outside

- All directions must coincide with safe distancing guidelines: 6 foot distance between all people/families.
- Participants in any gatherings should be feeling healthy and should be cough- and fever-free. Anyone with any symptoms should stay home.
- Parishioners and clergy 65 years old and older, and/or individuals with health risk factors, should continue to stay home and stay safe.
- Worship gatherings limited to less than 50 people as mandated by the Governor's Executive Order 7D.
- Facemasks or cloth coverings worn at all times, including by worship leaders.
- Clearly mark seating areas in pews and chancel/sanctuary outlining 6 foot physical distance.
- Eliminate touch points with service and worship materials.
- Remove Hymnals, Prayer Books, Bibles, and all other items from pews and pew racks.
- Sanitize pews, chairs and kneelers before and after worship.
- Empty and sanitize holy water/baptismal fonts, track racks, and other furnishings.
- Sanitize doorknobs, door push bars, railings, bathrooms, and other areas touched by human hands.
- No touching or greeting at the church door, at the Peace, or at any other time.
- Provide hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes at all church entrances and in all common areas.

- Reduce and monitor the number of entrances to worship spaces in order to better control numbers of worshipers and enforce safety protocols and directions.
- Direct users of bathrooms to disinfect surfaces and handles before and after use with cleaning wipes provided.
- Post visual information/signs outlining protocols and directions for physical distancing, hand cleaning hygiene, use of facemasks, respiratory etiquette, etc.
- Cordon off and/or close all halls, rooms, offices, hallways, and public spaces except for worship space and necessary bathrooms.
- Morning Prayer, Ante Communion, Spiritual Communion, or other non-Eucharistic worship only.
- Communion of bread and wine should not be consumed or distributed in any form.
- Use projection/digital devices for service orders. If you must provide bulletins, make provisions for sanitary distribution by gloved greeters/ushers and direct worshippers to remove the service orders they have used themselves.
- No choral/congregational singing as singing significantly increases the risk of the spread of respiratory droplets and possible infection.
- If soloist is singing, provide at least 25 foot safe distance from the soloist.
- Invite parishioners to continue with online giving as available. In-person offerings to be placed in a stationary, designated container with direction given that parishioners are not to touch the offering container.
- No coffee hour, social and educational gathering, or other receptions.
- Continue to provide online worship for parishioners unable to attend in-person worship.

Directions for Those Considering Reopening Parish Offices

- All directions must coincide with safe distancing guidelines: 6 foot distance between all people/families.
- Encourage employees 65 years old and older not to return to the office.
- Urge employees to do daily health assessments before entering office, and to remain home if experiencing any illness symptoms.
- Facemasks or cloth coverings worn at all times.
- All employees practice regular hand washing.
- Office use limited to 50% of occupancy as determined by Fire Marshall.
- Provide physical partitions between employees as possible.
- Employees not to be seated closer than 6 feet apart, including while dining.
- Meetings subject to 5 person limit.
- Avoid use of elevators, reserve elevator use for those who need it maintaining a 6 foot distance.
- High contact areas and bathrooms cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Common areas and lobbies cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Avoid sharing of equipment and sanitize equipment, such as photocopiers, after use.
- Provide hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes at entrance and in all common areas.
- Direct users of bathrooms to disinfect surfaces and handles before and after use with cleaning wipes provided.
- Directions and protocols for safe practices to be posted at all entrances and in common areas.

HEALTH

Additional Steps and Questions to Consider

- Who is at high-risk? The Center for Disease Control (CDC) defines older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. High-risk conditions and other factors include asthma, chronic lung disease, diabetes, serious heart conditions, chronic kidney disease being treated with dialysis, severe obesity, people aged 65 years and older, people in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, immunocompromised, and liver disease.
- Develop a plan to fulfill protocols and directions from staging the worship space to sanitizing afterward and everything in between.
- High-risk individuals (staff, volunteers, parishioners) should continue to shelter in place.
- If it has been determined that someone with COVID-19 has been in the building, what is your plan to communicate this to the parish while maintaining confidentiality? And, what is your plan to sanitize/deep clean the space?
- Are you knowledgeable about who is at high-risk in your community and how will you minister to them as we begin to gather for in-person worship?

WORSHIP

Additional Steps and Questions to Consider

- Discern together — clergy, vestry, worship leaders — what it might look like to resume in-person worship, being mindful of these protocols and directions, as well as federal, state, and local regulations.
- Consider if leaders (clergy, vestry, worship leaders) are comfortable returning to in-person worship. If not, how will you respond pastorally to their feelings and concerns?
- Remember, while offering online services, your parish has connected with some, perhaps many, who are not members of your parish and who might be interested in learning how to join the parish or participate in in-person worship.
- Parishes are encouraged to collaborate in online worship to share both the joy and effort involved in producing online worship.
- When resuming in-person worship, parishes offering online worship will need to continue offering online worship for parishioners at high-risk who cannot attend in-person worship until we are through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- When ready to begin in-person worship again, communicate in detail your COVID-19 protocols across multiple media venues (email, snail mail, website, social media, print) so that everyone has an opportunity to review and understand what is expected.

OPERATIONS

Additional Steps and Questions to Consider

- Determine in advance of in-person worship how many people can comfortably fit into your sanctuary, chancel, and nave while maintaining social distancing (marking family/individual space with 6 foot distance).
- If the anticipated number of parishioners attending in-person worship would be higher than capacity, develop a plan for pre-registration and/or multiple services.
- Establish a plan to count worship attendees and cap attendance once seating/space capacity has been reached.
- Articulate what are non-negotiable behavioral expectations regarding the protocols and directions. How will you respond appropriately and pastorally to those who refuse to follow the directions and protocols, or who are acting out?
- Have a plan to provide for all details needed to fulfill these protocols and directions from gathering and seating charts to a stockpile of disposable masks, and hand and surface sanitizers.
- What is your plan to update current building-use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
- Housing and food-insecure individuals and families continue to be in need in the midst of COVID-19. How will your parish continue, or reengage, these ministries in keeping with these protocols and directions?