

MAY 10, 2020

GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS

**THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST VIRGINIA:
LIVING IN THE PRESENT REALITIES AND INTO THE LIFE THAT IS YET TO BE REVEALED**



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NOTE OF IMPORTANCE TO PARISHES:

When in-person services return, no parish will be required to participate if they do not believe it is appropriate. Key discussions for those who lead our Parishes:

1. Does the entire Vestry feel it is safe and secure to begin in-person services? A unanimous vote is encouraged.
2. The Parish should go slowly and stay connected.
3. It is better for our Parish to open a month too late than a day too early.
4. It is important that we be thoughtful and prayerful to know when it is appropriate to return to in-person services.
5. The Daily Offices (Morning and Evening Prayer) is acceptable.

A WORD TO THE DIOCESE OF WEST VIRGINIA:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In late February, Marsha and I were in New York City for a meeting of the Board of The General Theological Seminary. That evening, we went to a Broadway Show and enjoyed our time together. The next day, we took Amtrak from Penn Station to Baltimore to rent a car to drive to my parish visitation.

Along the way, I was reading an email about some strange virus that was beginning to appear, and the question about whether one could continue to share the “common cup” at Eucharist. I remember responding that in the 1980s, the same question was asked and people were arguing both sides of the issue. I couldn’t recall if there was a definitive answer back then.

What a simple time it seemed just two months ago. Little did we know that in just a couple of weeks, the entire world would be quarantined; world travel would come to almost a complete standstill. Churches around the world would abruptly be told to cease holding in-person services, and virtual liturgies would quickly become the norm.

“Social distancing” was a phrase I had never heard, but it soon became part of daily living. Face masks and rubber gloves have become the new fashion, and we are learning how to be in relationship while being isolated. The world is different now.

However, the Church has not changed. Our love for God, for each other and for mankind is unending. We probably realize how deep that love is by the need to remain apart. Yes, the Church -- the Body of Christ -- has been sent home, to meet over the internet and to figure out new methods to continue “in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.” (Baptismal Covenant p. 304.)

A WORD TO THE DIOCESE, CONTINUED:

This has not been easy; however, creative minds have come forth, and people from around West Virginia are worshiping together in Wheeling, Bluefield, Huntington -- and even the National Cathedral. According to websites, more people are stopping by to check out "Church" than has happened in decades! This is the blessing of where we are.

But now, our elected officials are encouraging the state to make plans to reopen. At the same time, we are hearing that attempts to go back will result in further illness and death. Because of this, extreme caution is required, and the Church should expect nothing less from our parishes and people.

As we plan to reopen our Church buildings and begin our in-person liturgies, the reality is we have an obligation to protect the People of God who have been entrusted to our care. So, we cannot expect to return just as it was before. West Virginia has a population of high-risk people -- due to age and health conditions. Our parishes are not exempt from these risks. Unfortunately, we just cannot flip the switch and return to what we had before. I think we each recognize this. No matter how challenging it is to accept, we must. It is reality.

We will return slowly and in phases, which are outlined in the following pages. In the early phases, we will have strict guidelines and limited attendance. I know this is difficult to hear and understand so many miss gathering with their Church family. However, I believe it is where God is calling us. And, I know your love and care for each other will direct you to adhere to these **Guidelines and Expectations.**

At this time, I see us returning to our live, in-persons services no earlier than May 31, 2020, which is the Feast of Pentecost. God willing, this would be an ideal time to gather -- in a limited basis and with a limited number of people. Depending on the continued spread of this virus, this date could be changed again.

As we look to the next few weeks to come back on a limited basis, we also are called to look at the future of the Church and of the Diocese. What does God have in store for us, given what we have just been through? The Church in the 21st Century needs to be opened.

We will work together to come back and further live into God's vision for us.

God bless you.

Faithfully,
The Rt Rev W Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop of West Virginia

PROTOCOLS FOR REOPENING CHURCH BUILDINGS

PHASE 1

Our present reality:

- No live in-person gatherings
- No in-person Vacation Bible Schools
- No in-person Peterkin or summer camps
- Virtual liturgies and services have developed
 - Bible studies
 - Coffee Hours
 - Pastoral Care opportunities
 - Zoom/Online meetings

PHASE 2 - INDICATORS

- Continued decline in new cases:
 - Widespread testing is available and
 - Personal Protective Equipment is available.
- Significantly reduced gatherings may occur as outlined below.

NOTE:

ALL OPENINGS OF BUILDINGS REQUIRE THE BISHOP'S APPROVAL -- IN ADVANCE -- WITH EVIDENCE OF APPROPRIATE CAUTIONARY ACTION.

- Church Offices may open, with enough space for **physical distancing**:
 - There is to be no more than 1 person maximum per 500 square feet,
 - Cleaning and sanitizing of public spaces must be conducted.
 - Masks and gloves are necessary when multiple persons work in the same space.
- Celebrations of Eucharist, with **severely restricted** protocols:
 - Buildings are to be sanitized, with extra caution around door knobs, light switches, stair railings, pews, bathrooms.
 - All Prayer Books, Hymnals and Bibles are to be removed from pews.
 - No alms basins, but use a common depository--no touch.
 - No physical passing of the Peace.
 - No in-person Coffee Hours, or other social gatherings.
 - Virtual services are to continue--care for the higher risk persons.
 - Pastoral Care must be done with hygiene care. Care should be weighed with risks.

PHASE 3 - INDICATORS

- Hospitalizations are near 0.
- Treatment is readily available,
- Widespread testing and tracking are available.
- Vaccine is possible.
- Permission for increased numbers in public worship. Guidelines set by public officials, with Bishop's approval.
- Continued physical distancing, with masks and sanitizing.
- Eucharists still may be restricted with regard to masks, etc.
- Careful attention to the spread of the virus will help determine the resumption of church gatherings.

PHASE 4

- Resumption of Eucharists and Church functions. This must be carried out with specific attention to:
 - care and
 - attention to cleansing.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- What does the Church look like after Covid-19:?
- Do not forget the lessons we have learned and the movement this has caused us.
- Actions to take:
 - Continue virtual connections:
 - Meetings
 - Eucharists
 - Pastoral Care
 - Small Groups/Bible Studies
 - Online offerings.
 - Undertake evaluation of our buildings and how best to utilize them.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- THERE IS NO EXACT TIMELINE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY PHASE. AS YOU HAVE HEARD MANY TIMES, THIS IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT.
- THIS NEW WAY OF DOING CHURCH WILL BE A LONG EXPERIMENT AND WILL HAVE MANY TWISTS AND TURNS.

ORDER FOR GATHERED WORSHIP

- If you feel sick, stay home!
- If you are at higher risk -- due to age or underlying health concerns -- stay home.
- Masks and Social Distancing (at least 6 foot separation) are mandatory.
- No more than 15 domiciled units will be permitted (those living in the same house, whether single or multi-person).
- Hand sanitizer to be used liberally
- Empower ushers to enforce policies and procedures adopted by Vestry and Diocesan Leadership.
- No physical greetings. No handshakes or hugs. Remain distanced.
- Virtual services for those unable to attend are to continue.
- Deep clean all parts of the building:
 - Door knobs
 - Light switches
 - Pews
 - Bathrooms
 - Railings
- Remove all Prayer Books, Bibles, Pew cards from pews.
- Designate one entrance to the building and one exit to avoid crowding.

EUCCHARIST

- Altar party limited to 3 people
- As singing has been noted by the CDC to be a particular concern for spreading of the virus, choir and congregational singing is to be discouraged.
- Soloists may sing wearing a facial covering at all times, with social distancing in place.
- Organ or keyboard music can be played.
- All must wash hands and sanitize prior to service.
- At Exchange of Peace, all stay in place. No physical contact. Nods, waves, etc., are acceptable.

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THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

- Wash hands prior to the Great Thanksgiving.
- Wash hands prior to distribution of communion.
- Wear a mask at all times.
- **Communion by Bread only. No Chalice.**
- Communicants to be released by pews and domiciled units.
- Wearing masks, come forward to center aisle.
- Host is dropped in the hand. No physical contact.

DISMISSAL

- At dismissal, Celebrant will dismiss by pew and domiciled units.
- No congregating.
- No coffee hour or other social gatherings.
- Attendance should be taken to provide social tracking if necessary.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARISHIONERS

- The responsibility for keeping at least six feet between persons lies with each individual.
- We can, however, name the norms for our gatherings. We can ask everyone to abide by these health and safety guidelines, and are empowered to thoughtfully request those who cannot honor the practices in place to return when they are able to do so.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

- It is recommended that parishes consider increasing the number of services to allow for additional people to attend.
- Sanitizing and thorough cleaning are required after every service.
- Services may take place during the week.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Services held outside, weather permitting, should be considered.
- Other sacraments (Holy Matrimony, Baptisms, Unction) should be avoided at this time.
- Weddings may take place with appropriate distancing, sanitizing and facial coverings, along with limited attendance.

OUTSIDE GROUPS

- Deep cleaning and sanitizing required after each meeting.
- An agreement must be signed by outside groups to document they understand and agree to the terms of use.
- Social Distancing is mandatory.
- Limit of gatherings set at 20 people.