



PLANNING GUIDELINES

for Clergy & Congregations
in the Diocese of Southern Ohio

Contents

- 2** | Letter from the Bishop
- 3** | Preparing Your Building & Community
- 4** | Worshipping Together
- 5** | Changing Schedules & Location
- 6** | Greetings & Handouts
- 7** | Additional Worship Considerations
- 8** | Protocols & Practices

Dear Sisters & Brothers in Christ,

Our lives, our church, and our world have changed drastically since the emergence of COVID-19. The past few weeks have been filled with sorrows and blessings, challenges and opportunities, losses and celebrations. There is much to grieve and much to celebrate. God has indeed been our refuge and our strength during this time of trouble.

As we continue to live more fully into transition here in the Diocese of Southern Ohio, none of us could have imagined the context in which we now find ourselves. While it has been complicated and challenging in many ways, it has also been a deeply energizing and life-giving experience to walk this journey with you. We have heard so many inspiring stories from you on how you are worshipping differently. I am grateful to all of you for the efforts you have made, and how you are serving one another from afar. You have demonstrated in countless ways the pioneering, creative, and innovative spirit that forms our spiritual DNA here in Southern Ohio. We have discovered anew that we are one body together in the risen Christ.

As developments around COVID-19 continue to manifest at a rapidly changing rate, public worship in Diocese of Southern Ohio will still be prohibited at least until May 29, 2020, in line with the extended Stay at Home order issued in Ohio. This inevitably leads to the question, "When can we return to worship in our church buildings?"

We are awaiting more directives from Ohio Governor DeWine, the Centers for Disease Control, and the local Department of Health and Public Safety. Even when in-person worship resumes, we will not "get back to normal" for some time.

The guidance that follows is intended to address this new reality in which we find ourselves, and the practical reality of continuing the work of Christ in the world. It is intended to be a resource for clergy, vestries and bishop's committees to consider in advance of offering in-person worship. Setting clear expectations and sharing plans with our communities in advance will help tremendously in making the return to in-person worship joyful, meaningful, and above all safe.

These policies will likely change in the weeks and months to come. What seems appropriate today or next week may not apply in a month or in six months. As such, we will review these guidelines on an ongoing basis.

The Diocese of Southern Ohio and Diocese of Ohio will be working together in the coming weeks to provide additional guidance as to a phased approach for reopening in the state of Ohio.

As we plan for the resumption of in-person worship, it is important to be reminded that we will be living into a new normal. We cannot simply go back to "how things were." There will be grief and loss over what has been lost, coupled with hope and excitement in imagining what could be. This is all a part of the sacred mystery in which God remains our refuge and strength.

We are grateful to the Episcopal Dioceses of Georgia and Missouri, and to Suzanne I. Baillie, Interim In-House Counsel of The Episcopal Church, whose work serves as the foundation for these guidelines. These guidelines are intended to be an aid in developing a plan for each worshipping community, taking context and demographics into consideration.

The Bishop's staff is here to support you through this. Feel free to contact us to discuss any of these recommendations or to share your ideas.

As we chart this new course may God bless and keep you, those you love, and those whom you serve, now and always.

Faithfully,



(The Rt. Rev.) Thomas E. Breidenthal, D. Phil
Bishop Southern Ohio



Preparing Your Building & Community

- Deep clean your entire building, including, but not limited to: pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, stair railings, and microphones. [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html)
- Consider removing all non-essential items from all rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.
- Follow the Ohio Department of Health recommendations for water supply flushing for reopening of buildings: epa.ohio.gov/Portals/28/documents/pws/ODH-OhioEPA-Building-Owners-Occupants-Tenants.pdf
- Remove Bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc. from pews.
- Post signs about social distancing, maximum occupancy, hand washing, wearing of facial coverings, non-contact greetings and refraining from shaking hands or hugging. Free posters can be found here: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc&Page=2](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc&Page=2)
- Communicate with your congregation about the preparations that you have done for their arrival and that if they are sick, they should stay home and join online instead.
- It is advised all people, most especially clergy and lay staff, check their temperature to verify that they have no symptoms of illness before gathering for meetings or worship.
- Speak to volunteers to see if they are willing to make masks for your staff, volunteers and the congregation. Instructions for making your own sewn or no-sew face covering can be found here: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html)

(Do not use medical masks, which must be reserved for healthcare workers and first responders)

CPG Safety Tips for Religious Organizations can be found here: [cpg.org/globalassets/documents/publications/cic-coronavirus-safety-tips-for-religious-organizations.pdf](https://www.cpg.org/globalassets/documents/publications/cic-coronavirus-safety-tips-for-religious-organizations.pdf)

Worshipping Together

While physical distancing orders are in place, the return to group worship in a confined space must include:

- Keeping at least six feet between all persons who do not live in the same household and to ensure people keep a safe distance, possibly mark the pews/chairs that are “open” for sitting, and/or block off areas where people cannot sit.
- Wearing facial coverings i.e. masks, bandanas, scarfs etc.
- Making announcements at the beginning of worship to reinforce expected norms.
- Plan for dismissing congregants in an orderly way that ensures social distancing.

This spacing is also recommended for any contact our parishioners may have. Consider virtual coffee hour or a coffee hour that does not include serving any food or beverages while these orders remain in place. This will not prevent people from talking to one another, but will reduce the temptation towards unsafe behaviors. We want to encourage people to safely interact with one another, yet we cannot control behavior.

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.

Outside Groups

Currently the Governor is prohibiting any group gatherings larger than 10 persons.

For groups that meet outside the regular worshipping community, i.e. A.A., community groups, contractors, quilters etc., follow the below guidelines:

- Group size smaller than 10 people
- Adhere to social distancing and facial covering requirements
- Have a plan for how they will use and clean the building after use

Outreach & Feeding Ministries

- Follow Ohio Department of Health guidelines on food preparation, i.e wearing masks and gloves while preparing the meal: coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/checklists/english-checklists/Safe-Food-Handling-COVID-19-Checklist
- All meals are takeout only
- Manage guest social distancing while waiting for and after receiving the meal
- Clean kitchen and preparation spaces after each use, according to CDC guidelines

Continue Online Options

Even when in-person worship is allowed, some within our communities will be appropriately concerned about returning. We encourage you to continue the practices you have developed during the sheltering in place orders, whether that is creating your own online offerings or encouraging the congregation to attend online worship offered by other congregations across the Diocese and the wider Episcopal Church.

Congregations may choose to continue their online options until they are more comfortable to move towards in-person services. That said, virtual Eucharist will still not be permitted at this time.

Do not automatically assume that continuing to provide everything you have been offering online will be sustainable for your personal workload. Inviting others to engage with leading online worship opportunities will be a key component to this transition.



Changing Schedules & Location of Worship

As a result of the limitations on the number who can gather and how much distancing is required, your worship space may not safely accommodate all who wish to gather for a liturgy.

Adding additional liturgies or moving to a larger space, like a parish hall or outdoor setting, may help people keep safe physical distance. It is important to bear in mind that if you have multiple services on the same day, you will have to follow the cleaning/sanitizing protocols in between services.

Consider

- Multiple services with a few attendees.
- Having people sign up for those services in advance while allowing for a few new people to drop in.
- Having a service dedicated to those who are more vulnerable with even more extensive guidelines followed or held exclusively online.
- Creating and assigning fixed seating to maintain safe distances.
- Holding services outside.
- Continuing online worship with more leaders.

Greeting & Handouts

As we gather for in-person worship, we will still need to use printed materials and make first time visitors feel welcome. Where possible, email bulletins to the congregation, or post it on your website and invite them to use their tablets or smart phones in worship, or project it on a screen. We recommend having a greeter or usher, wearing a mask and gloves, standing six feet away, distribute individual bulletins for those who don't have access to the electronic version.

To avoid people touching door handles/knobs, keep the church doors open during worship. Consider having masks available for members and visitors.



Prevent touching of objects that the community is accustomed to handling communally

- Eucharist is suspended until physical distancing restrictions are significantly modified.
- Avoid passing a collection plate but instead have stations in the church where people can drop offerings and continue online giving options.
- Restrict handing out of bulletins and remove Bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc. from pews.
- Project all announcements on screen instead of using handouts.

Encourage healthy hygiene among participants

- Provide alcohol based hand sanitizing (at least 60% alcohol) dispensers at the entrance and in the worship space.
- Mandate people to wear non-surgical face coverings. Consider supplying ones to those who arrive without them.
- Place disposable facial tissues within easy reach and closed bins for used tissues.
- Provide visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- Empower ushers to enforce the guidelines set out by congregational/diocesan leadership.
- Volunteers with preexisting conditions and those over 65 year old that are at high risk should take extra precautions.
- Instruct greeters on how to greet post-quarantine - no handshaking or hugs.
- Have greeters hold doors open.



Additional Worship Considerations

Music

Singing has been identified by the Center of Disease Control as a particular concern of spreading COVID infections. Choir and congregational singing is discouraged altogether, given the possibility that it increases the chance for the virus to be projected much further than six feet. The use of keyboard or recorded music is recommended.

Passing the Peace

While the peace is often a time of social interaction in most communities of faith, while the physical distancing measures are in place, we need to have touch-free greetings at the peace with no shaking hands and hugging. Clergy and lay leaders in worship should model a wave or a bow while staying in place.

Offering Plates & Giving

The practice of “passing the plate” is discouraged during this time. The offering plates can be placed visibly within the community gathered and offerings can be placed during the offertory in one location. In advance of worship, set the expectation of online giving or mailing in checks. The Bishop’s office can assist in setting up online giving.

Worship Services without Holy Eucharist

Under the social distancing guidelines, the administration of the Eucharist elements bread and wine is not safe. Until further notice, the celebration of the Eucharist in public gatherings, is not allowed. The Daily Office (e.g., Morning or Evening Prayer, etc.) or the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Word through the Prayers of the People should be used. We will monitor this guideline frequently so that the celebration of holy eucharist can be commenced as soon as possible.

Child Care Services

When renting spaces for registered childcare services, according to guidance from the State of Ohio, you must have a Temporary Pandemic Child Care License issued by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) to operate a childcare service.

coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/checklists/english-checklists/pandemic-child-care-covid-19-checklist

Children are always welcome to stay with their families during worship, as they are full members of the Body of Christ.

* Note that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children 2 years of age and under do not wear masks or face coverings.

Protocols & Practices

Offices & Building Administration

Keep office functions as limited as possible to ensure essential operations. Those in the office must wear facial coverings; if you have more than one person in the office, make sure that surfaces, including the phone, are regularly sanitized. Follow the protocols issued by Governor DeWine for general office environments: coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/General-Office-Environments.pdf

The following 5 protocols for all businesses were issued:

- Mandate face coverings for employees
- Conduct daily health assessments by employers and employees (self-evaluation) to determine if “fit for duty.” Possibly include taking of temperatures.
- Maintain good hygiene at all times – hand washing, sanitizing and social distancing.
- Clean and sanitize workplaces throughout workday and at the close of business or between shifts.
- Limit capacity to meet social distancing guidelines. Establish maximum capacity at 50% of fire code. And, use appointment setting where possible to limit congestion.
 - We strongly suggest staff who can work from home continue to do so.
 - Continue to make use of Zoom for meetings as far as possible

Rites & Rituals

Rituals (weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations) could take place in a more traditional way, with careful attention to guest lists so as to keep under the gathering limit, and physical distancing plans.

It is recommended that new, fresh water be used for each person being baptized.

Correct Unsafe Practices

Some parishioners will stand too close to others, offer a hand to shake, or a hug. It is going to happen. Teach everyone the safe practices you intend to keep, in advance. Remind your community of faith that each person is responsible for themselves. Give parishioners or vestry persons who have the gift of offering a gracious word the task of giving guidance to those who struggle to change their behavior. Consider that some parishioners may need to be gently encouraged to stay home a little longer.

Revisit the Plan Regularly

We are in an ever-changing world. Our plans will need to adjust as more guidance is issued by the Governor of Ohio, Health Department and the CDC etc. This will be important as we return to in-person gatherings. Make a plan, carry it out, and then have a follow up meeting to reflect on how it went and what needs to change. An iterative process will be necessary to make the adjustments based on experience.





RESOURCES

- diosohio.org
- National Coronavirus Response: A Road Map to Reopening:
[aei.org/research-products/report/national-coronavirus-response-a-road-map-to-reopening/](https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/national-coronavirus-response-a-road-map-to-reopening/)
Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors:
[centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf](https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf)
- Guidelines for Opening Up America Again:
[whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/)
- State of Ohio COVID-19 resource:
coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/responsible-restart-ohio/welcome/responsible-restart-ohio
- [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/)