



# Plan for Re-Entry for Great Lakes Episcopalians

*Published on May 1, 2020; Updated May 4*

The Coronavirus continues to impact our communities across the world. As Episcopalians, we have a deep desire and call to care for our people, our communities, and each other through this situation.

Our goals include:

- Offering Hope to our communities in this uncertain time.
- Continuing to provide our people and communities with the very best pastoral care now and in the months to come.
- Providing the continuity of prayer and worship, whether gathered in person or digitally
- Protecting the most vulnerable among us by limiting contact and initiating practices to slow the spread of infectious disease

The following multi-phase plan contains practices for how Episcopalians in the State of Michigan will undertake re-entry after hiatus, pending further recommendations from health officials and our governor. **The way forward will not be immediate and may not be linear.** It is through a faithful balance of science and pastoral care that we will respond accordingly.

The plan contains the following:

- **Phase I:** Hiatus
- **Phase II:** Re-entry
- **Phase III:** Deeper Participation
- **Other:** Summer Programming
- **Appendix A:** Questions for the Vestry
- **Appendix B:** Resources

We recognize that all ministry is contextual. The guidelines articulate practices that fall into categories of "requirement" and "recommendation." Requirements are mandatory and enforceable by the bishop and are listed using the phrases "*must...*" and "*...are prohibited*". Recommendations, listed below using the phrase, "*we advise,*" are best practices and may be modified as appropriate to your local context under the authority of the vestry and/or clergy leadership.

And, as we continue to follow guidelines for safety, please remember to pray for the ill and recovering, for the grieving, and for the lonely. We pray for researchers, medical professionals, health policy experts, front line workers, and for those who clean and stock and ship. And we pray for each other - that we may continue to be a people of hope in the midst of fear and unknown.

Contact your diocesan office with any questions or clarifications, using the following contacts:

- Eastern and Western Michigan: Canon Katie Forsyth, [kforsyth@eastmich.org](mailto:kforsyth@eastmich.org)
- Michigan: Anna Stania, [astania@edomi.org](mailto:astania@edomi.org)
- Northern Michigan: Canon Jane Cislucis, [jane@upepiscopal.org](mailto:jane@upepiscopal.org)

## Phase I: Hiatus

### Building and Office Use Guidelines

We advise that staff members be permitted to work from home, as appropriate to their duties.

In-building staffing must be minimal and drop-in to maintain essential operations (deposits, mail processing, etc.) Staff members must communicate to ensure there is only one person in the building at a time and common surfaces, including door knobs, counter tops, and office electronics, must be disinfected before and after use.

We advise maintaining your standard count procedures with modifications to ensure safety and transparency.

### Worship & Formation

Churches are prohibited from in-person worship and all congregations are recommended to find means of gathering using online tools, including but not limited to:

- Sunday Worship
- Daily Office prayers
- Bible Studies
- Small Group formation and fellowship

Required Guidelines for Worship:

- Live-streaming from inside a church building is prohibited unless authorized by your bishop<sup>1</sup>
- “Drive-thru” Eucharist is prohibited
- “Virtual communion” in which a minister “blesses” bread and wine through a phone or online connection is prohibited. Please see footnote for Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s “Word to the Church”.<sup>2</sup>
- Graveside funerals of ten people or fewer are permitted, while following physical distancing and mask guidelines
- Outdoor weddings of five people or fewer are permitted, while following physical distancing and mask guidelines
- Baptisms are permitted on an emergency only basis

## Recommendations for Gathering while Separated

We advise offering opportunities to gather your community while physically separated using digital tools like video conferencing and social media, for ongoing worship, formation, and fellowship.

We advise identifying a method by which your leadership will continue to engage your non-online parishioners, whether by phone, training and assistance to get access online, or some other means.

We advise that all pastoral care be conducted virtually, as you are able. In-person contact must be minimal.

## Service and Outreach:

- Requirements for group size, physical distancing, sanitation, and use of masks must be followed.
- Distribution ministries must limit volunteer time spent inside the building. Distributions may only take place outside or on a curb-side basis.
- There must be no preparation of food in the building unless authorized by your bishop.

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<sup>1</sup> On-site rectories are exempted from this requirement in the Diocese of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Word to the Church: On Our Theology of Worship:

<https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-michael-currys-word-church-our-theology-worship>

## Phase II: Re-Entry

Please remember that many of our congregations are composed of individuals that meet the description of vulnerable population. Re-opening might not be appropriate for every congregation. Congregations might also consider stepping up in scale, offering, and size to reach the new limit.

Before you choose to re-open, please work with your vestry to answer the questions listed in [Appendix A](#).

### Preparing the Church for Re-Entry

Before any re-entry, congregations must deep clean the entire church building, including pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, stair railings, and microphones. Please see [Appendix B](#) for current cleaning guidelines from the CDC.

We advise the consideration of removing all non-essential items from rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.

We advise posting signs and making announcements about non-contact greetings and reminders to refrain from shaking hands and hugging.

We advise communicating with your congregation before they arrive about the preparations you have done for their re-entry and to reiterate that, if they are sick or are of a vulnerable population, they should stay home and join online, if available through your congregation or another.

## Building Use Guidelines

### Office Guidelines

We advise that staff members continue to be permitted to work from home, especially the immunocompromised, parents of children, and those older than 60.

We advise keeping in-office functions as minimal as possible, only to ensure essential operations.

Any staff members working from church-owned buildings must continue to follow social distancing and sanitary guidelines, including:

- Maintaining six feet of separation between individuals

- Regular handwashing and sanitizer use
- Regular disinfection of common surfaces including door knobs, countertops, and office electronics.

## Other Guidelines

Congregations must follow all physical distancing and hygiene guidelines including use of non-surgical masks. Please consider having a supply for those who arrive to your building without one.

Buildings must be thoroughly cleaned regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.

We advise posting signs outlining COVID symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they experience symptoms or feel unsafe.

We advise maintaining appropriate stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer, and disposable paper towels for drying hands.

We advise the consideration of allowing building users/rental groups back in (music lessons, etc.) on the condition that they are able to observe gathering limits and hygiene protocols.

We advise creating an emergency plan for possible outbreak and how you might respond in care, in communication, and in cleanliness.

We advise maintaining a visitor log (including phone numbers and email addresses) for all who enter the building in the event that they may have come in contact with someone with the disease and reporting is required. To the extent possible, the log should be managed by a greeter or an office staff-person or volunteer or follow some other no-touch method.

## Worship Guidelines

Congregations may choose to begin to offer small worship gatherings while following the following guidelines.

The following options might be appropriate considerations as congregations begin to re-enter:

- Maintaining some online worship and formation opportunities for those that will still be unable to join an in-person gathering, either due to risk or sense of safety
- Multiple services with fewer attendees to spread out the number of people gathered at one time
- Having people sign-up for services in advance while allowing space for visitors who may drop in

- Creating and assigning fixed seating to maintain safe distances
- Holding services outside

All common surfaces must be cleaned before and after worship, including door knobs, counter tops, pews, electronics, and sacramental items.

### Requirements for Gathering Size and Contact:

- Limit events and meetings that require close contact. Most, if not all, meetings and formation opportunities should continue to take place online.
- Limit any in-person worship gatherings to no more than 50 people, or the maximum number for your space while allowing 6 feet of total separation between households, whichever is fewer. If your ASA<sup>3</sup> is above 50, consider how hybrid-worship<sup>4</sup> or multiple service times might spread out the number of people gathered at any one moment.
- Non-surgical masks are required. Please consider having a supply for those who arrive to your building without one.
- To avoid crowding and bottle necks, there is no receiving line following a service.
- There is no nursery or in-person Sunday school or coffee hour following a service. Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling in-person.

### Requirements for Worship:

- Sharing in the Eucharist is prohibited. Maintain the use of Morning Prayer on Sundays.
- Live-streaming may resume from inside the church building while maintaining appropriate physical distancing with any participants.
- There is no physical touching during the passing of the peace.
- There is no passing of an offering plate through the pews. Encourage worshippers to offer financial gifts online or to a stationary plate as they come in or during the course of worship to limit contact.
- Households must sit at least six feet apart, 360°, if gathered for in-person worship.

### Recommendations for Worship:

- Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading the virus.<sup>5</sup> We advise refraining from singing when gathered in-person, or consider how you might make extra precaution to further separate singers from the congregation and from each other.

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<sup>3</sup> Average Sunday Attendance.

<sup>4</sup> Holding simultaneous in-person and online worship, or offering an in-person opportunity and an online opportunity at separate times.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Abram Wagner summary on singing and COVID-19:

<http://eastmich.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Dr-Abram-Wagner-COVID-19-and-Singing.pdf>

- We advise the consideration of removing prayer books, hymnals, and bibles from pew racks during this time. Worship services may be followed using single-use bulletins (that are picked up rather than handed out), by sending a digital copy for people to access on their personal devices, or by use of screen and projection. Please make every provision for recycling single-use bulletins and limiting the number of bulletins printed for one household.
- We advise developing a plan for dismissing congregants in an orderly way to ensure social distancing as people exit.
- We advise empowering your ushers to remind participants about these guidelines and state requirements.
- We advise developing a plan to reduce the number of doors that people must touch to enter your service, including the use of door stops or greeters.

### Requirements for Special Services:

- Baptisms, weddings, and funerals may resume and must be limited to fewer than 50 people in attendance, while following distancing plans.

### Service and Outreach:

- Requirements for group size, physical distancing, sanitation, and use of masks must be followed.
- We advise that distribution ministries limit time spent inside the building and allow for outside or curbside service.
- Any food distribution must be to-go, or served by a person using gloves. Buffets are prohibited.
- Food may not be prepared inside the church building unless authorized by your bishop.

## **Phase III: Deeper Participation**

### Building Use Guidelines

Events and in-person gatherings are permitted. We advise making every provision to avoid crowding.

In-person meetings are permitted. We advise considering how you might enable your high-risk members to join your gathering digitally.

Regular office operations are permitted. We advise considering how you might maintain flexibility for staff members that are high-risk or have children unable to attend school or access childcare.

Communal spaces must continue to be cleaned on a regular basis, including before and after gatherings.

We advise maintaining a visitor log (including phone numbers and email addresses) for all who enter the building in the event that they may have come in contact with someone with the disease and reporting is required. To the extent possible, the log should be managed by a greeter or an office staff-person or volunteer or follow some other no-touch method.

## Worship Guidelines

Worship gatherings of all sizes are permitted with the following guidelines:

- We advise considering maintaining an online/hybrid worship option for people that are high-risk and needing to maintain stay-home precautions.
- Physical distancing is not required. We advise avoiding crowding in the sanctuary and building to the extent possible. Consider offering multiple services to help people spread out.
- We advise considering continuing to remove prayer books, hymnals, and bibles from pew racks during this time and instead use single-use bulletins or digital copies for people to access on their personal devices. Please make every provision for recycling single-use bulletins and limiting the number of bulletins printed for one household.
- Congregations must continue the use of no-touch alternatives for the passing of the peace.
- Congregations must continue the use of no-touch alternatives for the offering.
- We advise setting aside special space within your worship area to be designated for people of vulnerable populations

Eucharist is permitted, with the following guidelines:

- Clergy must wash their hands with soap and water before services and use hand sanitizer visibly before distributing communion. If a clergy person or parishioner feels sick or has any symptoms, they should remain at home.
- We strongly advise against using the common cup. Though it may seem counterintuitive, intinction is not a safer choice. Please remember that receiving in one kind (bread or wafer only) is full participation in the Eucharist and congregations may consider making provision for distribution without the use of a common cup.

Coffee hours are permitted with the following guidelines:

- Congregations must make every provision to ensure adequate space to avoid crowding.



- A gloved person must distribute any food or drink. Buffets and self-serve are not permitted.

## Other: Summer Programming

We advise against offering in-person summer programming, including Vacation Bible Schools and Mission Trips.

While the risk to children appears to be somewhat lower, there is an ongoing risk of carrying the virus back home and sharing with other family members. We advise considering providing an online or no-touch drop off at-home activities.

**The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Houglan, Jr.**, Bishop, Eastern and Western Michigan

**The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie Perry**, Bishop, Michigan

**The Rt. Rev. Rayford Ray**, Bishop, Northern Michigan

*This plan was compiled in conversation with the bishops, staffs, and elected leadership of the Episcopal Dioceses in the state of Michigan, following current recommendations of the CDC, and with resources offered from [the Episcopal Diocese of Texas](#), [the Wisconsin Council of Churches](#), and the Office of the Presiding Bishop.*

## Appendix A: Questions for the Vestry

We offer this list of questions for your vestry to consider in consultation with your clergy and parish staff. When we enter Phases II or III, we recommend you work through these questions before deciding to re-open for in-person gathering.

- How will you maintain connection with those who cannot gather in-person, even when restrictions are lifted?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping with household groups sitting six feet apart?
- How will you discourage congregating after worship services?
- How will you continue to be invitational and open to people that are not yet part of your community?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection for your communal spaces?
- How might your building use agreements need to be updated to reflect the new realities revealed by the pandemic?
- How will you maintain necessary stewardship to maintain operations while the congregation, or part of it, is dispersed?
- What assets do you have (space, yard, volunteers) that might be used to respond in service to your community in light of the pandemic?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual, while remembering privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you conduct an intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

## Appendix B: Resources

[MapDash-COVID-19](#) - an online resource for checking COVID-19 data on a local level

[Centers for Disease Control](#) - vast resource for COVID-19 precautions and suggestions

- [Cleaning your Facility](#) - guide for building cleaning
- [Sanitizing Office Spaces](#) - guide for frequently used spaces
- [Preparedness for Sacred Spaces](#) - a set of best practices for religious institutions

[State of Michigan Coronavirus Information Hub](#)

## Log of Updates

Updated 5/4: Added diocesan seals, names of bishops