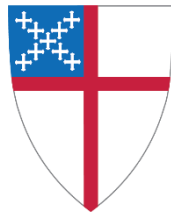


Returning to Public Worship Guidelines for the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee

Spring 2021 Revised Guidelines



COVID-19
Doing what love requires!



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF
MILWAUKEE

Introduction

We are resuming our common life together as The Church, well aware of the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We are hopeful that these guidelines will enable us to safely expand our communal worship and community activities, and to express Christ's and our love for each other spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

The Diocesan Leadership closely monitors the overall well-being of the diocese and its parishes and the risks associated with gathering, and delegates the level of decision making to the parishes. The Way Forward Task Force monitors and analyses the scientific updates, effects of the vaccines, viral variants, and medical guidance, and operates as a consulting resource to the Diocese and individual parishes.

Changes in guidelines will continue to reflect evolving science during the pandemic, recommendations of the experts, and guidance from the Diocese. The guidelines are updated through ongoing pastoral discernment; review and discussion of the published medical evidence: local and national medical and public health organization recommendations; local, state, and federal health authority guidelines and directives; as well as other diocese and faith community guidelines, practices, and recommendations.

These requirements and recommendations apply to all church activities, worship, baptisms, weddings, visitations, and funerals. Each congregation will continue to update their plans for their parish's expanded return to public worship. Guideline requirements are to be incorporated into parish activities. Guideline recommendations are based on questions and observations that have been received and referenced best practices and may be incorporated as appropriate to the individual Parrish situation.

COVID-19 Principles Updated

The evidence is clear now that the COVID-19 respiratory virus is primarily spread through close contact with large respiratory droplets and smaller particles in the air (aerosol particles). Spread via respiratory particles deposited onto surfaces is less likely. Proper ventilation of the Air We Share has become more important than surface sanitizing. Safe return to full in person group worship is dependent upon preventing continued spread of the COVID-19 virus by all routes, and controlling of the numbers of active COVID-19 cases measured in the community in which the church is located.

There is still no group gathering that is 100% risk free. Risk of spread can be mitigated by managing the size and location of gatherings, use of masks, level of crowding, noise level, ventilation, and screening. The risk is lowest in a community with a low rate of active COVID-19 for small group gatherings of short duration, outdoors with properly masked and distanced individuals using normal voice levels. Risk increases very rapidly when events are moved indoors.

All the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing death and severe illness. Less is known about their effectiveness at preventing spread of infection. Medical experts have identified **behaviors that must be continued** to reduce COVID-19 spread until positive effects of vaccines are seen. These measures include:

- Masks worn over nose and mouth to prevent droplet and decrease aerosol transmission.
- Distancing 6 to 10 feet apart or more
- Limiting the amount of time spent close together in an enclosed space.
- Hygiene: handwashing and hand sanitizer
- Maintaining a healthy gathering environment: Ventilation and cleaning

The diocese assessment of risk for a gathering considers the rate of COVID-19 in the community and the following formulas:

- a. The Risk of becoming Infected with COVID-19 virus at a gathering = Exposure to Virus X Time (spent with contagious people and /or air containing the virus).
- b. The Risk of Outcome = Likelihood of catching COVID-19 X Consequences (infection, hospitalization, and death)

The Diocese is committed to providing the necessary information to individuals so that they can make an informed, personal decision prior to attending any in-person gathering. We expect parishes make the information about safety practices and the CDC decision making tools about small and large gatherings available.

Parish reopening progress depends on how the virus affects our greater community and is subject to change. We must recognize that the gradual process of moving worship back indoors and increasing attendance may have to be reversed if COVID case counts worsen or an outbreak occurs in the congregation.

As of the date of this document, in the CDC, Considerations for Events and Gatherings; (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>), they recommend:

“COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are extremely high across the United States. To decrease your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19, CDC recommends that you do not gather with people who do not live with you at this time. Attending events and gatherings increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. Stay home to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.”

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Section 1 - Requirements

Gathering Criteria, Attendance, Safety Measures, and Screening for All Activities

1. General

- a. All gatherings require masks, a minimum of 6 to 10 feet of distance between individuals or household groups, and screening unless otherwise specified. Gatherings indoors shall be 30 minutes and 60 minutes for outdoors.
- b. The final decision on changes in guidelines and requirements for the diocese will be made in collaboration with the Diocesan Leadership, the Way Forward Task Force, and the parishes.
- c. The Diocese of Milwaukee Regathering Risk Assessment Dashboard (Dashboard) and published county limits should be used to determine the size of the gathering. The number may vary from county to county and from day to day.
- d. The number of people allowed is the Dashboard rating (which uses a general criterion that results an acceptable probability or less that a contagious person with COVID-19 could be present), your county's/community's health department restrictions, or the facility capacity with social distancing, whichever is smallest.

2. Attendance Criteria

The criteria for the number of people allowed will be the smallest number permitted by:

- a. Your local health departments, Wisconsin Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control, the Guidelines **and**
- b. The parish's assessment based on the Diocesan Dashboard found at:
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1uv-7Dx4w1BDQSACf827iWCbflzMSirV2NFiDYosQwD8/edit?usp=sharing>

Attendance will not be limited to only vaccinated persons for any parish worship, gatherings, or meetings.

3. Dashboard Use:

It is recommended the parishes check the Dashboard periodically to assist in decision making and decide on conducting services 3-4 days prior to allow for notification.

The Dashboard assessment colors of counties can change daily; parishes need to check it periodically. Parishes should consider adjusting their plans for gathering based on their county's status and trend, especially if it worsens.

Please note that counties not in 'green' assessment incur a greater risk of having a person with a contagious case of COVID-19 present. Therefore, Clergy, Wardens, and Vestry member shall read the following CDC Guidelines as part of planning for any reopening event or gathering: CDC, Considerations for Events and Gatherings; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

The following is the guidance for application of the Dashboard ratings:

- a. Under all ratings:
 - i. You may gather outdoors with capacity limits based on the maximum number of 6-10 ft. distanced individuals or household units the space can accommodate, **provided** that number is below any local or state restrictions and all Guideline requirements are met.
 - ii. You may gather indoors for worship at 25% capacity, masked and 6-10 foot distanced for a maximum of 30 minutes, providing all Guideline requirements are met.
 - iii. You may conduct services where participants drive into a designated parking area and do not leave their enclosed vehicle.
 - iv. You may gather in your building solely to live-stream services.
 - v. You may make home communion visits.
 - b. Sunday school and nursery care will be phased in at a later date but is not currently allowed.
 - c. Because masks are removed to eat and drink, coffee hour and other fellowship events where food is served will not be held until allowed by the Diocese and local health departments. This is to reduce risk of aerosol particle spread.
 - d. It is recommended that outside organization meetings (except 12-step recovery programs or other churches worshiping in our facilities) be conducted online or outdoors. Any use of the church facilities will meet the same requirements for social distancing, masking, and disinfection/cleaning.
 - e. Consider suspending indoor gatherings when the number of active cases exceeds 300/100,000 (purple rating) on the dashboard and/or when the local health department requires it.
- 4. Personal Decision Making**
- a. It is required that all participants (clergy, congregation, and visitors) be provided the information from the CDC about **factors that increase risk of severe COVID-19 illness**, so they can make an informed personal decision prior to choosing to participate in church activities.
 - b. This decision-making information is changing monthly as more is learned. The following three CDC reference links should be used:

- i. [Do I need to Take Extra Precautions Against COVID-19 | CDC](#)
- ii. [Older Adults and COVID-19 | CDC](#)
- iii. [Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness | CDC](#)

These medical conditions currently include:

Cancer
Chronic kidney disease
COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
Dementia and neurological conditions
Diabetes (type 1 and type2)
Down Syndrome
Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system)
Overweight and Obesity
Pregnancy
Sickle cell disease
Smoking (current or former)
Solid Organ Transplant (Immunocompromise)
Substance Use Disorders

5. Attendance

- a. The parish determines the schedule of when people will attend services, if the parish will preregister for services with capacity limits, and how attendance will be recorded.
- b. Parishes will assist public health departments with contact tracing if requested. If a parishioner who attended worship tests positive for COVID-19, the local department of public health will determine contact tracing for that individual.
- c. Parishes will create a strategy for dealing with a potentially ill attendees and addressing behavior of non-compliant and defiant attendees.
 - i. It is recommended that a person other than the clergy or senior warden be designated to address non-compliance during the service.
- d. **Illness or symptoms discovered during a service:** If during a service, a person becomes ill or exhibits symptoms, they should be isolated if possible. Close off the area as possible and do not use the space until after cleaning and disinfecting (preferably waiting 24 hours). See and follow the procedures in, "If Someone Gets Sick": [Considerations for Events and Gatherings | CDC](#)

6. Screening

- a. No one who is ill shall attend a church gathering or public worship.

- b. Each parish is required to ask screening questions of each attendee. Screening is done during pre-registration and verified prior to entry at the gathering, or prior to entry.
- c. If anyone is ill or answers “yes” to one or more of these questions, they may not attend in person worship. The symptom list below is as of the date of this document. [Symptoms of Coronavirus | CDC](#)
 - i. Do you have any of the following symptoms?
 - 1) Fever and/or chills
 - 2) Cough
 - 3) Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - 4) Fatigue
 - 5) Muscle or body aches
 - 6) Headache
 - 7) New loss of taste or smell
 - 8) Sore throat
 - 9) Congestion or runny nose
 - 10) Nausea or vomiting
 - 11) Diarrhea
 - ii. In the past two weeks have you had exposure to anyone diagnosed with COVID -19?
 - iii. Are you currently waiting for results of a COVID test?
- d. **Note:**
 - i. Temperature screening is not required or recommended unless required by your local health department.
 - ii. “Immunity Passports” will not be accepted.
 - iii. **Vaccinated persons** must still pass the screening questions and follow all mask and distancing requirements.
 - iv. A signed informed consent to attend worship or signed screening form is not required.

7. Masks

- a. Snug fitting masks shall be worn by all over age 2, including during preparation and set up for all gatherings and services (vesting), pre-recording, videotaping, or livestreaming (if participants are not from the same household), outdoors at gatherings, inside the church, and especially in poorly ventilated spaces.
- b. Masks will be available and offered to all attendees who do not have one.
- c. No congregational or choral singing, wind instruments, choir /ensemble rehearsals inside or outside the church building are permitted.
- d. Mask exemptions will not be accepted.

- e. Considerations for Celebrants/Officiants/Lectors/Soloists:
 - i. Celebrants/Officiants/Lectors may remove their mask while speaking if the following conditions are met:
 - 1) They are vaccinated.
 - 2) There is a 20-foot arc in front and to their side where no one is seated.
 - 3) It is preferred they have a microphone and sound amplification.
 - 4) The Celebrant remains masked during the consecration of the Eucharist when celebrated.
 - ii. A soloist, cantor, or duet with members of the same household may sing if they are masked and meet the same conditions as Celebrants/Officiants/Lectors.
- f. Consider double masks (cloth and paper) with the paper, medical procedure mask worn under the cloth mask.
- g. If all attendees at a small gathering (10 persons or less) are fully vaccinated and wish to meet unmasked, verify the [CDC guidance for Vaccinated Persons](#) for the current guidance on what vaccinated persons can do in small gatherings. Social distancing should be maintained. Current guidance still recommends wearing masks.

8. Distancing

- a. A minimum of 6 to 10 feet of distance in all directions will be maintained between each Individual attendee or household unit.
- b. Parishes will identify entrances and exits to encourage one way traffic flow through the gathering space. Mark 6-to-10-foot spaces as needed to prevent crowding.
- c. Measure and mark off locations for sitting, standing, waiting areas for indoor and outdoor gathering spaces to determine gathering capacity and maintain distance for each gathering.

9. Ventilation

- a. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and provide acceptable indoor air quality for the current occupancy level for each space and season. For detailed guidance regarding HVAC systems, see [Ventilation in Buildings | CDC](#)
- b. Before multiple services per day are provided in the same worship space, seek professional HVAC evaluation of the ventilating system to determine adequate outside air exchange between services.

- c. Decrease occupancy for gatherings where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.
- d. Avoid gathering in poorly ventilated spaces.
- e. Doors and windows (as possible) shall remain open for ventilation even when temperatures are unpleasant.
- f. Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows and when there is adequate exhaust ventilation. Portable fans should direct air out of a space through a window or door. Avoid placing fans in a way that could potentially cause contaminated air to flow directly from one person over another.
- g. Ensure restroom exhaust fans are functional and operating at full capacity when the building is occupied.
- h. Inspect and maintain local exhaust ventilation in areas such as kitchens, cooking areas, etc. Operate these systems any time these spaces are occupied. Consider operating these systems, even when the specific space is not occupied, to increase overall ventilation within the occupied building.
- i. Consider running the HVAC system at maximum outside airflow for 2 hours before and after the building is occupied.
- j. If indoor gatherings are not permitted, church restrooms should be used only if absolutely necessary during outdoor events. Fans that vent to the outdoors should be kept running.

10. Hygiene

- a. Continue to encourage hand washing before and after events and have antibacterial hand gel available.
- b. Clean high touch areas (door handles, handrails) regularly and between sequential worship services. Leave doors open to minimize repeated handling and improve air exchange.
- c. Offering plates should be placed at a convenient location rather than passed hand to hand. Wash hands before and after handling and counting. Postpone “counting” to a future date unless counters are not attending worship, as time spent together counting would exceed the 30-minute gathering maximum.
- d. The peace should be exchanged verbally and distanced.
- e. Communion may be distributed in one kind (bread only). Individual cups for wine which are disposable, disinfected in a commercial dishwasher, or washed in kitchen dishwasher on disinfect setting may be used. A common cup shall not be used.

11. Cleaning and Disinfection – spaces should be considered as if a contagious individual may have been present.

- a. Follow cleaning and disinfection guidance from the CDC: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility | CDC](#)
 - b. Ideally for safety and ease of cleaning:
 - i. Multiple services should not be held in the same space, on the same day.
 - ii. Multiple services should be held in separate spaces using separate entrances, indoors or outdoors, if held on the same day.
 - iii. Cleaning should take place a minimum of 24 hours after a space has been used. The volume of active virus on surfaces decreases considerably over the first 24 hours. The more time between a service and the cleaning of the space, the less any disinfection is needed.
 - c. PPE including masks, gloves, and gowns or coveralls should be provided for cleaning crew as needed for cleaning chemical protection and aerosol particles.
 - d. Outdoor spaces may be used more than once in a day. Any non-wood railings, tables, benches, or other “touchpoints” in the space should be cleaned between uses as much as possible. Outdoor wood does not require cleaning.
12. **Outdoor Gatherings:** Note that outdoor tents with sides or low tops are considered an indoor space due to reduced ventilation.
- a. Gatherings are limited to 60 minutes.
 - b. **Parishes shall create a plan showing actual measurement and location of the seating areas and 6-to-10-ft. spaces between them, to calculate their maximum capacity.**
 - c. Individual parishes will continue to monitor their county COVID-19 data and Diocese Risk Assessment Dashboard (Dashboard).
 - d. Parishes shall monitor local public health guidelines to ensure that they remain in compliance with any changes. The most restrictive guidance from either the diocese or health department/state shall be used for capacity.
 - e. During inclement weather, the service can be moved indoors, provided provisions have been made for over capacity attendees. (e.g. virtual service options, Live stream, FM transmitter)
 - f. In all cases, outdoor gatherings shall observe the requirements from the Guidelines, including masks, distancing, screening, and maximum time together. In addition:
 - i. Seating spaces should be marked.
 - ii. Participants bring their own chairs if chairs are to be used, and take chairs with them when they leave.
 - iii. Parishes choosing to provide chairs will have a plan for who will distribute, collect, clean and store the chairs being mindful of the time spent together in close contact.
 - iv. Use electronic amplification (e.g., microphone, bullhorn) as shouting increases aerosol transmission.

- v. Children are not permitted to run around or visit others during the gathering.
 - vi. Participants should not linger on the premises following the gathering.
 - vii. Clergy will not greet participants individually as people leave gatherings.
- g. Any other groups who use diocesan properties may begin meeting outside as of the same date these guidelines take effect, provided all the guidelines are observed.

13. Special Events:

- a. Plans for special events, fund raisers, community events, blood drives, outreach events run by other organizations etc. require general masks, distancing, and ventilation, capacity principles, and any local regulations to be followed. In addition to the references in this document, the WFTF can be consulted for additional information and planning resources.

14. Exceptions

- a. If a parish would like to conduct a special event that does not meet the requirements of these Guidelines (an example would be a Vacation Bible School) they should do the following:
 - i. Prepare a plan for the event.
 - ii. Submit the plan to the Diocese Leadership with a copy to the WFTF for approval of the exception. The WFTF will provide consultation to the Diocese Leadership and assist the parish in gaining approval for the request.
 - iii. Incorporate recommendations or requests from the diocese from approval review.

Section 2 - Recommendations

General Recommendations

As reopening continues, many have found it necessary to announce the specifics of the flow of the service and of receiving communion:

1. Liturgy Resources

- a. Print the service in bulletins and have a bin available to have them thrown away in and/or encourage people to take bulletins home.
- b. Create an online version that can be used on electronic devices.
- c. Encourage attendees to bring their own Books of Common Prayer (BCP) from home.
- d. BCP's and hymnals may be used if only used once in a 24-hour period.

2. Holy Communion

- a. Communion wafers are recommended rather than homemade bread.
- b. The Celebrant continues to use antibacterial gel before and after consecration, and after distribution.
- c. The clergy person should drop the host in the communicant's hand.
- d. If hand to hand contact is made as the host is distributed, the clergy person will use antibacterial gel before distributing to the next person.
- e. If the congregation comes forward to receive communion, 6 to 10 feet distance must be maintained between communicants.
- f. The clergy person may choose to distribute the host to the people in the pews.
- g. Once the person has received the host, they will either step away or wait until the clergy person has stepped away and then remove their mask to consume the host.
- h. If wine is provided in mini-cups, hand to hand contact should be avoided and antibacterial gel be used if touching occurs.

3. Building Considerations for buildings that have not been used in several months:

- a. Flush the water system if the building has not been in active use.
- b. Open all faucets and taps and run the water for 5 minutes to flush the system.
- c. Consider emptying and refilling the hot water heater.

4. Pastoral and Lay Eucharistic Visits

- a. Clergy and lay eucharistic ministers may conduct pastoral visits using the current CDC guidelines for vaccinated or non-vaccinated persons and these Guidelines.

Section 3 – Additional Resources

1. CDC references and other peer reviewed scientific literature were used as references in the development of Returning to Public Worship Guidelines for the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee. References and COVID-19 related materials are located on the Diocese website at: <https://www.diomil.org/resources/covid-19-prevention-and-preparedness/>
2. CDC References specifically for personal and event decision making:
 - a. CDC, People at Increased Risk, And Other People Who Need to Take Extra Precautions, Updated Apr. 20, 2021; [Do I need to Take Extra Precautions Against COVID-19 | CDC](#)
 - a. CDC, Older Adults, At greater risk of requiring hospitalization or dying if diagnosed with COVID-19, Updated Apr. 16, 2021 ; [Older Adults and COVID-19 | CDC](#)
 - b. CDC, People with Certain Medical Conditions, Updated Apr. 29, 2021; [Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness | CDC](#)
 - d. **CDC, Considerations for Events and Gatherings, Apr. 27, 2021;** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html> **(Required for Clergy/Vestry)**
3. It is the consensus of the scientific and medical community that the lowest chance of transmitting respiratory illness will occur when the shortest amount of time is spent, by people spaced the furthest distance apart, snug fitting wearing masks in the most well-ventilated space possible. Currently, there are no published peer reviewed scientific studies that have determined a precise time, distance, and rate of air flow in a space to prevent the spread of COVID -19.
4. The CDC reference for Building Heating, Air Conditioning and Ventilation (HVAC):
 - a. This reference should be consulted prior to initiating changes to HVAC system(s). Ventilation in Buildings, Updated Mar. 23, 2021; [Ventilation in Buildings | CDC](#)
 - b. If changes to HVAC system(s) are anticipated, it is recommended you consult with:
 - i. Minor adjustments and upgrades – Certified HVAC technician or contractor (Please note that HVAC technicians are not registered with or regulated by the state like other professions in Wisconsin).
 - ii. Major adjustments, equipment purchases, and upgrades – registered professional engineer with a specialty in HVAC systems.

5. Choral singing continues to be identified as a high-risk activity. Results of Studies investigating best practices to minimize risk in real life settings are not complete at this time. Here are some references to explain the ban on singing and wind instruments:
 - a. The International Performing Arts Aerosol Study webpage, information, and updates. <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/>
(Note: Some refer to this as the “NFSA study, NFSHSA study, University of Colorado-Boulder Engineering study and University of MD Engineering Study; the U of Colorado/UMD National Association of Teachers Study” or by the names of the Study Chairs: Mark Spede and James Weber or Principal researchers Shelly Miller and Jelena Srebic.)
6. CDC, Short clear update on How COVID-19 Spreads, Oct. 28, 2020; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>
7. Parishes considering HEPA air cleaning devices/systems and/or UV disinfection or sanitizers, and cleaning devices that are being marketed, should read the CDC Ventilation in Buildings section on these systems and CDC cleaning guidelines **before entering into any agreement**:
 - a. CDC, Ventilation in Buildings, Updated Mar. 23, 2021; [Ventilation in Buildings | CDC](#)
 - b. CDC Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes, Updated Apr. 5, 2021; (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>)The peer reviewed published scientific evidence for UV light room sanitization varies by type of system and in some cases is inconclusive to absent.
8. Regarding the safety of the host in communication, currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. It is important that all participants always wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before preparing or eating food. <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/newsletter/food-safety-and-Coronavirus.html>
9. The following are the criteria used for determining the color codes for the Diocese Risk Assessment Dashboard:

‘Green’ is less than 40 cases per 100,000 residents in a given county. This is the lowest and **desired risk category** for a gathering of 25 or less.

'Yellow' is between 40 cases and 120 cases per 100,000 residents in a given county. This is a **higher risk category** for a gathering of 25 or less. Consideration for greater than 10 foot spacing should be given.

'Red' is between 120 cases and 299 cases per 100,000 residents in a given county. The risk for **gatherings of 11 to 25 or more is considered unacceptable**. Indoor gatherings of up to 10 would be considered acceptable but with a **higher risk**. Consideration for greater than 10 foot spacing should be given.

'Purple' is above 300 cases per 100,000 residents in a given county. **Parishes should consider conducting no indoor gatherings.**