



## PHASE TWO PASTORAL DIRECTION FOR CLERGY AND PARISHES OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN WEST MISSOURI

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*MAY 4, 2020*

*[We] boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

*Romans 5:3-5*

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

For us, in our day, these are unprecedented times. History records many challenges like the ones we now face plagues of disease, the scourge of wars, economic depressions. The main misfortunes before us today, however, are unprecedented in the lives of those now living. Our lives, our church, and our world have been changed and are being further because of the emergence of COVID-19. Strangely, though, not all is gloom. Truly bright characteristics of the human spirit have also emerged. And so, the past months have been filled with diametric opposites – 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, enduring strength, and source of unshakable love in our troubles.

Not so many weeks ago, as we pursued God's mission in the various localities that make up The Episcopal Church in West Missouri, none of us could have imagined the context in which we now find ourselves. What we face has been complicated and challenging in many ways, but it has also been a deeply energizing and life-giving experience to walk this journey with you. You have demonstrated in countless ways the pioneering, creative, and innovative spirit that forms our spiritual DNA here in West Missouri, a spirit that descends from our founding Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Jackson Kemper, the First Missionary Bishop of the Episcopal Church. We have discovered anew that we are one body together in the risen Christ, ***One Ministry in West Missouri.***

While sheltering-in-place, with our churches closed, and all but essential businesses shuttered, we have been in Phase One of the world's COVID-19 response. Now, however, the inevitable question on every Episcopalian's lips is, "When and how will we be able to go back to in-person worship?" The question is valid and timely, and signals that it is time to think about the next phase of our COVID-19 response. Phase Two will be characterized by a gradual return to in-person ministries. This cannot be done quickly, and it is hard for leaders to be sure they are doing the right thing. Developments around COVID-19 continue to manifest at a rapidly changing rate, and I find that I am faced with such a plethora of governmental orders (sometimes quite contradictory) that I am unable to provide a single Pastoral Directive that would fit all contexts and is universally usable by all parishes and congregations.

I have come to believe that the most prudent action I can take is to delegate decisions about when to resume in-person worship, as much as possible, to local clergy and lay leaders. Therefore, Priests-in-Charge, in consultation with parochial lay leaders, may create plans to resume in-person worship. These plans must comply with the guidance of local health authorities and the orders of your local governments. Caution: these are ever evolving! Additionally, whether part of your local government's orders or not, I require the following criteria be met:

- COVID-19 cases are on the decline for 14 days in your city or county.
- Testing is adequately available for those showing symptoms.<sup>1</sup>
- A plan to safely resume in-person worship and other in-person ministries is submitted to and approved by the Bishop's office.

The plan you submit shall explain:

- your local government's orders,
- how you intend to meet those requirements,
- information on the decline in COVID-19 cases and adequacy of testing, and
- how you will meet the following **Guidelines** outlined in the rest of this document (see the following pages).

When these conditions are met, the Bishop's office may give permission to return to in-person worship.

**Please note** — The requirement that plans be submitted to the Bishop's Office is not intended to be odious, but prudent and judicious. These are precarious times. The number of cases of COVID-19 will rise and fall (it has fluctuated wildly in the Heartland in the last week). We may see a new statistical spike at any time after society "re-opens", and large numbers of the people we serve are among the most at-risk. We may resume in-person worship only to have to go back again to sheltering-in-place. Businesses may open only to have to close once more. Lives are at stake, and I feel obligated to proceed with abundant caution and ample carefulness. The truth of our moment, acknowledged by all experts, is this: Even when in-person worship resumes, we will not "get back to normal" for some time. Indeed, we will never get back to the old normal but will find a new normal, hopefully one that seizes the missional opportunities that will emerge.

The **Guidelines** that follow address the new reality in which we find ourselves as well as 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 and formation. Setting clear expectations and sharing plans with our communities in advance will help make a return to in-person worship joyful, meaningful, and above all safe.

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

The Rt. Rev. Martin S. Field  
8<sup>th</sup> Bishop of West Missouri

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<sup>1</sup> Check with your Health Department & MapDash (see link below) for up-to-date COVID-19 data for your area.

# PHASE TWO GUIDELINES

## INTRODUCTION

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I am grateful to the clergy of West Missouri for the council offered, the clear thinking displayed, and the tenacity to stay the course of leadership in this oddest of all times for the Church. I also am indebted to the Dioceses of Georgia, Missouri, Texas, and Kansas, with whose bishops I have consulted and whose work contributes to and serves as the foundation of these guidelines.

## I. LOCAL PHASE TWO PLANNING

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Any return to in-person activities comes with risk. There are no risk-free options. Local clergy and lay leaders must weigh the risks inherent in bringing people out from their homes to gather in public, even if for the most exalted of reasons – the praise of Almighty God. Risk is exacerbated if the people we bring from their homes are older or have other, risk-increasing health conditions. Local leaders must consider many factors and may certainly (and with my blessing) decide to remain in Phase One of our COVID-19 response, meaning they may continue refraining from in-person worship and formation. There is no requirement that any parish or congregation resume in-person activities if local leadership is not comfortable with the risk.

These guidelines are intended to aid each worshipping community in developing its Phase Two Plan as it takes context and demographics into consideration. Once plans for in-person worship have been developed, please email them to [canonord@diowestmo.org](mailto:canonord@diowestmo.org) or mail them to: The Rev. Canon Steven Rottgers at 420 W 14<sup>th</sup> St, Kansas City, MO 64105.

## II. CONTINUE ONLINE WORSHIP AND FORMATION

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Even when in-person worship is allowed, some individuals will be rightly concerned about returning to church. Continuing the online practices you have developed during the shelter-in-place (or stay-at-home) orders will continue to serve this segment of our membership, and probably many visitors as well. Whether you have been creating your own online offerings or encouraging congregants to attend online worship offered by others across the Episcopal Church, please remember what a vital need these offerings served and that some still need them.

*About your workload:* Please recognize that continuing to provide online offerings while simultaneously resuming in-person activities may not be sustainable for your personal workload. Involving others in leading worship and formation whether online or in-person will be a key component to your health in this transition.

## III. WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

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Physical distancing orders remain in place as we “re-open” society, so returning to group worship in a confined space will need to include:

- Keep at least six feet between all household groups during worship and while moving around buildings.
- All person over the age of 2 should wear masks.
- Notification of these norms sent to all parishioners well before resuming in-person worship so they may prepare.

- Announcement of these norms at the beginning of worship to reinforce expectations.
- No coffee hours or fellowship time before or after worship.
- No food or drinks will be offered.
- Drinking fountains turned off and labeled “Do Not Use”.
- In some jurisdictions, you will be required to register the contact information of all attendees to aid contact tracing should that subsequently be needed.

The 6-foot spacing is recommended for any contact our parishioners may have. This will not prevent people from talking to one another but will reduce the temptation towards unsafe behaviors. The responsibility for keeping at least six feet between persons lies with each individual or responsible adult. It may be helpful, however, to mark off our pews or seats in such a way that people have visual clues about where to sit to maintain the needed spacing.

It is up to us to name the norms for our gatherings, to ask everyone to abide by them, and even to request people not to participate if they cannot comply.

### **A. CHANGING THE SCHEDULE AND LOCATION OF WORSHIP**

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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 settings, will help people keep safe physical distance. In considering how you might divide parishioners between multiple worship services, you might decide to adopt a method by which people sign up for or are assigned to certain worship times. Be creative. Also decide who will keep a count on those in worship, how you will register their contact information (required in some places), and how you will ask those who arrive after your maximum capacity is reached to wait until a later service.

### **B. OPTIONS FOR PRINCIPLE LITURGIES**

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1. ***Morning Prayer*** — For public health reasons, I highly recommend that Morning Prayer or Ante-Communion be your Principle Liturgy on Sunday mornings.
2. ***Holy Eucharist*** — Experience suggests that faithful Episcopalians desire the Eucharist. That desire notwithstanding, please remember that SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that leads to the disease we call COVID-19) is predominantly transmitted by water vapors exhaled from nose or mouth and then received through the nose, mouth, or eyes. There is no completely safe way to distribute the elements of Holy Communion, so offering the Holy Eucharist safely will be a challenge. Touching a face mask (to remove or shift it) contaminates it. Proximity to the communicant is a risk to the communion minister and those receiving.

Consider options within your tradition that minimize contact. This may mean you need to further postpone offering Communion. At best, leaders can only create a plan that mitigates disease transmission as much as possible.

As I have mentioned repeatedly during Phase One, it is possible and acceptable for the congregation to participate in the community consecration of Holy Communion and to receive of that Holy Sacrament by Spiritual Communion. This is the safest way to partake of the Sacrament of the Altar. For clergy concerned about “being special or privileged” if they receive a physical Communion while others do not, I suggest the Presider lead the consecration and also abstain from receiving physically but receive a Spiritual Communion

like all other worshippers. The consecrated bread/Body and wine/Blood can then be reserved for later sacramental use. Prayers to assist worshippers with Spiritual Communion were provided in an earlier Pastoral Direction, copies of which can be provided if requested.

If you and your co-parochial leaders choose to accept the risk of physical distribution, please consider every available option to mitigate spreading the virus and to put in place a plan for the safest administration possible. Think through how you will minimize person-to-person contact for administering the sacrament; how you will sanitize and re-sanitize while you administer the sacrament; and, how all participants will orchestrate their movements. This will vary for each congregation and space.

Consider how persons can come one at a time and return to their seat without getting too close to others. Consider the use of masks by the presider at the Holy Eucharist or covering the elements being consecrated. Consider serving only the consecrated Bread and not the Cup. Consider how you can serve the Elements in a contactless way (use tongs to pass bread to avoid hand-to-hand contact, drop the Bread into cupped hands rather than placing it, etc.).

The Book of Common Prayer, at the time of consecration states, *“At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or to lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.”* Consecration can be accomplished even if the Elements remain covered.

### **C. GREETING AND HANDOUTS**

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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 ahead of time and invite them to use their tablets or smart phones in worship. Have a greeter or usher, standing six feet away, staff a welcome table with the needed materials available for pick-up in a no-contact way. The greeter can offer a welcome and answer questions from a safe distance.

I discourage offering nursery or childcare. There is no way for a caregiver to avoid being too close to small ones, so consider very carefully whether nursery and/or childcare can be offered within the limits of acceptable risk. Also, make sure parents are aware of your plans and guidelines.

To avoid people touching door handles/knobs, keep the church doors open during worship. Also limit the number of entry points to make later sanitization easier and to control the number of places where people will come into contact.

Make hand sanitizer available for all. Consider having masks available for members and visitors. In places where contact information registration is required, think about how you'll keep a pen sanitized (let one hand do all the writing, or sanitize between each person who picks it up).

Paper holds the virus well. Remove 2/3 of all BCPs, Hymnals, etc. from the pews. Divide the removed books into two even piles. You now have 3 distinct caches of books. Change out the books in the pews each week for a different cache and rotate weekly. If you carefully track which books have been recently used, you will have “quarantined” each stack for a 14-day period prior to

re-use. Since attendance will be limited, there should be plenty of books to put some out and quarantine the rest.

Recycle all handouts that are not taken home. Do not reuse, even for another service on the same day.

#### **D. SINGING AND CHOIRS**

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Congregational singing is discouraged as evidence (gleaned from Episcopal Relief and Development and the Medical Trust of the Church Pension Group) suggests that vapor droplets travel farther when people are singing. (I guess it the lung power behind those high notes!)

During this transition, consider forgoing a choir and simply use soloists, duets, or small ensembles. If you have a choir, each member must maintain the physical distancing requirement and is strongly encouraged to wear a mask. Consider doubling the distance between singers from 6 feet to 12 feet.

#### **E. PASSING THE PEACE**

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While the Peace is often a time of social interaction in many communities of faith, while 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. Consider addressing this “norm” during before-the-liturgy announcements.

#### **F. OFFERING PLATES & GIVING**

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The practice of “passing the plate” is discouraged during this time. The offering plates can be placed visibly within the gathered community (such as on a pedestal or table) and offerings can be placed during the offertory or while coming and going from the service. In advance of worship, set the expectation of online giving or mailing in checks. Assign someone to keep watch over money sitting in public view.

#### **G. OTHER RITES, RITUALS & EPISCOPAL VISITATIONS**

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Other rites and rituals (weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations) will continue to be problematic until larger assemblies are permitted. The same maximum attendance guidelines are in place for these services as well. Therefore, these can only take place after careful attention to guest lists to keep under the gathering limit and physical distancing plans.

Confirmations will not resume until attendance limits have been sufficiently raised to allow for the celebratory gatherings we all want these rites to be.

Episcopal Visitations on Sundays will not resume until we are able to gather without the Bishop and his wife counting against an attendance limit. There’s no point in Donna and me coming if our arrival means we bump two parishioners out of attending.

Weekday Visitations can resume at any time as long as we follow all the safety protocols or accomplish our visit via online conferencing.



## **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE PROCEDURES**

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Keep office functions as limited as possible to ensure essential operations and consider only coming into the office for essential tasks and coordination. Those in the office should be wearing masks, especially when preparing anything that will eventually be shared with the public such as worship bulletins, flyers, etc. If you have more than one person in the office, make sure that surfaces, including the phone, are regularly sanitized. Computers that are shared should also be sanitized.

## **SMALL GROUPS & OUTSIDE GROUPS**

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Small groups such formation classes, committees, Vestries and Bishop's Committees, etc. may resume in-person meetings under the same guidelines for masking, physical distance, maximum total attendance.

Outreach ministries (like feeding ministries) can continue, but they should endeavor to use no-contact delivery practices.

Outside groups who use your building(s) may continue or resume but must follow the same rules about masking and physical distancing.

## **SANITIZING THE CHURCH AFTER ALL USES**

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Prior to resuming in-person worship or formation all communal areas where people will come together should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.

When in-person worship and formation resume, hard surfaces should be cleaned after each gathering and in between worship services or classes using the same space. There should also be a thorough, final cleaning after everyone (except the cleaning crew) has departed.

For groups that meet outside of regular worshipping hours, i.e. A.A. groups, contractors, quilting bees, DOK chapters, etc., create a plan for how they will use and clean the building after use.

## **CORRECTING UNSAFE PRACTICES**

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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 or restrain their behavior. Consider that some parishioners may need to be gently encouraged to stay home a little longer.

## **REVISIT THE PLAN REGULARLY**

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Do-Reflect-Adapt-Do. This will be important as we return to in-person gatherings. Make a plan. Carry it out. Have a follow up meeting to reflect on how it went and what needs to change. Try again. This cycle, when repeated in an iterative process, will help improve your plan week by week.

## QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP TO CONSIDER <sup>2</sup>

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We offer this list of questions for the leadership of each worshipping community to consider in devising a plan for in-person worship. We recommend that you work through these questions before re-launch:

- How will you maintain online streaming, and how will that need to adjust when there is also in-person worship happening?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping in family groups sitting 6 feet apart?
- How will you discourage the receiving line after church and/or congregating after worship services?
- How will you cap attendance at events so there is room for members of the community to join you and so you don't exceed maximums?
- How will Christian formation take place? How might you create or continue online formation for children, youth, and adults?
- What should be done with small groups who have shifted to meeting online? How might you continue these when in-person worship resumes?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection of communal spaces?
  - Worship bulletin disposal
  - Rotation of prayer books, hymnals, etc.
  - Areas where small groups gather during the week
  - Nurseries and/or playgrounds
  - Pews or chairs following worship
  - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in the building
- How will you update your building use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have encountered that individual while maintaining privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

## RESOURCES

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1. **MapDash-COVID-19:** an online resource for checking COVID-19 data on a local level <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b9a7af8e97174a4e86db59bee72ed7c0>
2. Centers for Disease Control – Vast resource for COVID-19 precautions and suggestions <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
3. Cleaning your facility – guide for building cleaning <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
4. Sanitizing Office Spaces – a step by step guide on frequently used spaces <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>
5. Preparedness for Sacred Spaces – a set of best practices for religious institutions <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Wisconsin Council of Churches, <https://www.wichurches.org/>