

Reopening Guidelines

VERSION 5 | APRIL 7, 2021



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Dear Ones,

When Dr. Anthony Fauci held a teleconference with bishops of the Episcopal Church in August, he advised us that the way back to normal for our COVID-19-ravaged country was through masks and vaccines. Today, over a year into this pandemic, we can see the shimmer of post-pandemic times on the horizon as vaccines roll out to younger populations. We are also learning that the COVID-19 pandemic, and its variants, will be part of our new normal and new surges will remain a threat. As we seek to balance the desire to gather in person for worship and community with public health risks, this revision to our diocesan guidelines will shape the way forward. Our conditions will continue to evolve, and we will make any necessary updates to these guidelines in June.

In considering your regathering plans, I hope you will pay particular attention to your congregation's demographics, its access to and embrace of vaccines, and its physical environment. In Indiana, all residents aged 16 and up are now eligible to receive a vaccine, but it will be some weeks before all who desire a vaccine will be able to receive one, and children are still ineligible. How will you include people of mixed vaccination status during this interim period? Would allowing the vaccinated to participate in some activities while precluding those not eligible lead to hurt feelings and division?

In addition to these considerations, I hope you will also continue to focus on the important local public health metrics outlined below. Your regathering team may always decide to be more protective than local and state guidelines, and may, indeed, decide that it is best to continue gathering online.

Whenever you choose to regather in person, please know of my deep appreciation for the faithfulness and care you have shown for one another and for all of God's people throughout the pandemic. We have been through a long and difficult time together, beloved. But, as the psalmist wrote, "joy comes in the morning," and if we continue our vigilance a little longer, we will surely see the dawn. As always, you are in my prayers. We can do this!

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jennifer Bookman-Burrows".

+Jennifer

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This revision, made April 7, 2021, supersedes all previous versions of this document.

When your congregation decides to regather in person, please follow these updated guidelines:

MASKS

Continue to wear masks, regardless of vaccine status when indoors at church functions. Household groups, spatially distanced outdoors, may remove masks when seated for worship services.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

Maintain at least 6 feet between household units whether inside or outside.

CAPACITY

Capacity may increase to local and state limits so long as 6-foot social distancing is maintained.

FRESH AIR

Introduce fresh air whenever and wherever possible. Go outside, open windows, work with your HVAC professionals to adjust your system where possible.

COMMUNION

No changes to the previous guidelines for offering Holy Communion, which are reprinted below.

BAPTISM

Baptism is permissible in the normal fashion, with both the water rite and chrismation by the officiant. While administering the rite, masking protocols should be followed and distancing should be maintained when possible.

ONLINE WORSHIP

Continue to provide meaningful online worship and fellowship opportunities for people at home. As you consider what “hybrid church life” looks like in your context, expect to experiment with what will work best for your congregation. For instance, live streaming a Sunday worship service may not be as effective as live streaming a mid-week service and continuing to offer Bible study on Zoom.

MUSIC

A choir of no more than four people may sing together indoors, including with the congregation present, so long as all singers are fully vaccinated, wearing a well-fitting mask, and distanced at least 6 feet from any other person. Please think about air flow in your indoor spaces, the likely



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mixed-vaccination status of your congregation, current transmission rates in your community, and the inclination people will have to join in the singing when deciding whether to permit singing with the congregation present. For congregations in which it is certain that every attendee is fully vaccinated, congregational singing is permissible while observing all of the guidelines for masking and distancing.

More people, regardless of vaccine status, may sing together as a choir outdoors and with the congregation present so long as all are masked and distanced at least 6-feet from any person. These guidelines also apply to brass and woodwind instrumentalists.

PROGRAMS

Christian formation classes, vacation Bible School, mission trips, and other programs may take place outdoors or indoors with appropriate masking, distancing, ventilation, etc. Congregations seeking to resume these activities should submit their plans to the bishop's office for review.

New understanding of virus transmission shows that standard cleaning efforts are sufficient; prayer books and hymnals may remain in the pews, and paper bulletins may be used. Please continue the contact tracing protocols provided below, and make sure to communicate your parish's guidelines and clear expectations to outside groups.

Public Health Guidance

We recommend that regathering teams continue to follow these guidelines for assessing local public health conditions:

- The number of COVID-19 cases in your county has decreased for 14 days or has held steady with a mere handful of cases (five or fewer). Find this information on the [Indiana COVID-19 dashboard website](#).
- The infection rate is less than 1.0, which means that on average in the community, each infected person is infecting less than one other person and the total number of current cases is shrinking. The infection rate for many Indiana counties, but not all, may be found on the [Covid ActNow website](#).
- The positive test rate is less than 10%, preferably closer to 3% or less. The positive test rate measures how many people test positive compared to all who were tested in a given period of time and indicates whether testing is widespread enough to detect most new cases. The ability to identify and isolate cases is key to controlling the infection. This information may also be found on the [Covid ActNow dashboard](#).
- The [Regenstrief Institute dashboard](#) tracks additional datapoints for each county in Indiana and includes other metrics such as hospitalization rates that can assist in assessing the risk of exposure in your county.

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Contact Tracing Protocols

Consider gathering contact information from all worship and meeting attendees. Recording names will enable your local health department to more quickly trace, test and quarantine people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if an attendee is later found to have had the virus at the time they were present. Advance registration for services will ease the process of collecting contact information. Consider using an online church management system, such as Realm, or a free online event service such as Eventbrite, to take reservations.

Pandemic Communion Protocols

- Communion host and wine should be brought to the table by the presider. Presider sets their own table and only presider should be at table.
- Pour only a small amount of wine in the chalice to be consumed at the end of the service when unused hosts are consumed. No wine should be distributed.
- Only have presider host directly in front of you during consecration. Have a ciborium of hosts for congregants to the side and consider covering the elements being consecrated. When using communion wafers, the presider should only touch and then consume a small priest host distributing the rest to the congregation.
- Think through how you will minimize person-to-person contact for administering the sacrament, how you will sanitize and re-sanitize before and while administering the sacrament, and how you will orchestrate your movements. Please remember that according to The Book of Common Prayer rubrics, consecration can be accomplished with a minimum of gestures and touching of elements.
- Create directional signage and instructions for how to receive communion.
- Communicants should receive the host while still wearing a mask and consume after moving away from the priest.