

The Diocese of Southern Ohio

Updated Guidelines for Public Worship

Revised October 22, 2020



It is clear that we will be living with COVID-19 for months or even years until a vaccine is available. The following guidelines are intended to assist parishes in moving forward with in-person worship during the winter months when outdoor options are limited while mitigating the risks.

In all circumstances, a congregation should not be more liberal in its policies than the requirements mandated by state, county, and local governments. While this document specifically addresses worship, the same guidelines may be applied to other events such as meetings or concerts. We expect the local leadership, priest and senior wardens will make decisions based on the health and safety of their community.

At all levels of the Public Health Advisory Alert System, the following safety measures should be employed for public worship:

PPE

- Require use of masks
- Have extra masks on hand

Hygiene & health

- Disinfect hands frequently
 - Place disinfectant dispensers in prominent locations
 - Post health self-assessment signs
 - Display Diocese of Southern Ohio “As We Gather” signs providing safety guidance throughout your buildings: https://episcopaliansinconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/As-we-gather_final.pdf
- We suggest all congregations use this phrase approved by our Chancellor in signage: “We ask that all present observe our guidelines and rules for health and safety during worship. We cannot and do not guarantee the absence of risk from your presence with us.”

Physical distancing

- Maintain six-foot distance between household units
- Mark available/unavailable seating to encourage distancing
- Consider multiple services with lower attendance at each
- Require pre-registration if necessary
- Mark one-way patterns
- Refrain from physical contact, including at the Peace
- Preach/read at least 20 feet from the congregation, preferably with a plexiglass barrier when indoors

Minimize surface contamination

- Remove common objects such as BCPs, hymnals
- Keep doors open or have an usher open doors
- Place an offering plate in a prominent location rather than passing it and/or encourage online giving
- Remove water from baptismal fonts and stoups

Ventilation

- Keep doors/windows open whenever possible
- Keep HVAC system well maintained, preferably with continuously running fan

Sacraments

- Use fresh water for each Baptism
- See guidelines for Holy Communion, Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation at https://episcopaliansinconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Communion-Guidelines_v2.pdf

Singing

- Singing guidelines can be found at https://episcopaliansinconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Singing-guidelines_FINAL.pdf

Disinfecting

- Disinfect areas of the church in use after each service, especially door handles and other commonly touched surfaces

Contact tracing

- Collect names and contact information for all attendees
- If someone tests positive for COVID-19, make appropriate notifications to others who were present

Online options

- Encourage high risk persons to worship via live streamed or prerecorded services

Worship Rites and Ohio Public Health Advisory Alert Levels

» To see your county's current alert level, visit each Thursday for weekly updates:

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system>

Ohio alert level	Indoor worship	Outdoor worship
	<p>Permitted rites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service of the Word • Morning Prayer • Evening Prayer <p>Attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No in-person congregation • Live stream/prerecorded only • 10 people or fewer involved 	None
	<p>Permitted rites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy Eucharist (distr. host only) • Service of the Word • Morning Prayer • Evening Prayer <p>Attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% capacity maximum† 	<p>Permitted rites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy Eucharist (distr. host only) • Service of the Word • Morning Prayer • Evening Prayer • Baptism • Wedding • Graveside service <p>Attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 people maximum†

† Regardless of the maximum attendance number, no more people should be in attendance than allows for adequate physical distancing.

Ohio alert level	Indoor worship	Outdoor worship
	Permitted rites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy Eucharist (distr. host only) • Service of the Word • Morning Prayer • Evening Prayer • Baptism • Confirmation, Reception, Reaffirmation†† • Wedding • Funeral Attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% capacity maximum† 	Permitted rites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy Eucharist (distr. host only) • Service of the Word • Morning Prayer • Evening Prayer • Baptism • Confirmation, Reception, Reaffirmation†† • Wedding • Funeral Attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 people maximum†
	Permitted rites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All rites Attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% capacity maximum† 	Permitted rites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All rites Attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 people maximum†

†† After Bishop Breidenthal's retirement, not all congregations will be able to be visited annually by a bishop. If confirmations, receptions or reaffirmations are desired, the diocesan office should be informed so that need can be accommodated.

Every building, congregation, and setting is different. The rector, priest-in-charge, or senior warden may, at her/his discretion, apply more restrictive policies than those outlined here. If substantially less restrictive policies are planned, they should first be approved through the bishop's office.

In-Home Eucharistic Visitation

- Must be symptom free, including no fever
- Limit to 3 - 4 people
- Wear a mask. This is non-negotiable. Optimally, the person/people you visit will also be wearing a mask
- Maintain social distancing (6 feet minimum), and do not touch anything in the room
- Use hand sanitizer and or sanitizing wipes on your hands, after the initial prayers
- Step forward, drop a host into the hand of the recipient(s), without touching their hands, and step back to a distance of 6 feet before they lift the mask and consume the host
- After the recipient(s) have consumed the host, close in prayer
- Wash your hands with hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes after you leave

This feels awkward and unsociable: not sitting and chatting, not sharing a cup of coffee together. And this is the most loving thing we can do: keep one another healthy.

Questions regarding the diocesan guidelines for in-person worship during COVID-19 may be directed to the Rev. Canon John R. Johanssen, Canon to the Ordinary (jjohanssen@diosohio.org), or Carine de Lange, Operations Executive (cdelange@diosohio.org).