



May 18, 2020

Dear People of God in the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon:

We are living in extremely difficult and challenging times but times also that call us to a deeper sense of God's presence and abiding love. With our Church buildings closed to public worship and the mandate to physically distance ourselves, thus, keeping ourselves and those around us safe, life in the church has stretched all of us, leaders and parishioners alike, in ways we could have hardly imagined. Some of the ways we have stretched have taught us good lessons we had yet to learn about who is included in Sunday worship and who finds it challenging to attend in-person worship. Many have told me that this lesson is calling them to find ways to continue online worship, even when the current crisis has run its course. And so, while much has changed, some of what is new has been found to be good for the future.

We have learned a great deal about pandemics, physical distancing, PPEs, and most importantly, about our loving God. As Presiding Bishop Curry says, "It is important for us to remember to care for ourselves, but not for ourselves alone. The moral primacy of Jesus' command to love God and our neighbor must guide us in all of our decisions." This moral primacy is what we should find guiding the plans we make as we consider how to reengage with our church buildings and in-person worship.

When evaluating this pandemic, I refer primarily to information released by [Governor Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority](#) for state information and the [Centers for Disease Control](#) for national information about the coronavirus disease. Both of those sources also provide local and national requirements and recommendations to help slow the spread of the virus.

To understand how this is affecting the Episcopal Church, I speak regularly with my colleagues in neighboring dioceses, and pay attention to what [The Episcopal Church and Presiding Bishop Michael Curry are saying about our response](#).

As members of the faith community we are called to continue to listen carefully to what comes from the Governor's office and from the medical professionals who are advising her office. As Dr. Anthony Fauci has said, we cannot make the timeline; the virus makes the timeline. With deep love and care for our neighbor, the Diocese of Oregon will proceed cautiously as we reengage our church buildings so that the Church can continue to be a safe place for all to worship God. As Governor Brown defines Phases 1 and 2 into our re-entry into our communal life together, let us think about how we can build a stronger, more inclusive Episcopal Church in Western Oregon.

I do not believe that we are heading back to a time before the virus appeared, I believe we are crafting a new church for a new reality. I invite you to join me in this journey.

If we do our good work now to plan so that everyone is safe then there may be fewer changes we need to make as the State moves from Phase 1 to Phase 2 and so on. And yet, one of the things we have learned about this pandemic to date is that we do not fully understand it and changes will be inevitable in the way we fight it and protect ourselves and other from it. Just as the State of Oregon may need to look to county health officers to guide our individual communities back to normal based on local health data, our re-entry into life together will be guided by how our local health officials' view of how we may safely re-engage with one another.

Thank you for your efforts to worship together in new ways. I continue to be amazed at the great work that is occurring among us during this extraordinary time. And I have no doubt that the church that will be created will be a wider and better community of followers of the one who died for us and rose again.

The pages that follow outline our thinking at this time as we consider how we reengage with our buildings and continue the ministry of Jesus to the world. These guidelines are to be considered diocesan norms for this time until further notice. At the end of the diocesan guidelines you will also find information on the states phased reopening plan for Oregon. This is provided in order to give you the context for our diocesan guidelines.

One final note: Governor Andrew Cuomo recently spoke about the rule of one. He reminds us that it takes only one individual who is positive for COVID-19 to infect an entire room. So, let us be careful as we reopen our buildings and begin to worship in person. Do not feel that you need to begin in person worship until you are sure you can do this with all of the safety precautions in place. Remember the clergy are in charge of worship by canon law and if they chose to wait extra weeks to begin holding services in person this is their right and responsibility. Respect their decisions.

In the name of our loving, liberating and lifegiving God,

Bishop Michael Hanley

Diocesan Guidelines for Reengaging our Church Buildings

Diocesan Guidelines for Congregations in Counties not yet in Phase 1:

- In-person worship can begin, presuming all state and relevant county requirements met, including gatherings of less than 25, and 6 feet physical distancing. Approval by Bishop Hanley of the congregational plan is required before any in-person worship can begin. Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals are permitted in this phase as long as they adhere to all the above guidelines. (see the relevant section below for more information on these sacraments.)
- Face masks should be worn by all in all church buildings.
- Vulnerable populations (those over 60 or with underlying health conditions) should continue to shelter in place.
- Employees who are not in vulnerable populations may come to church where tele-commuting is not feasible, maintaining physical distancing and wearing face masks.

Diocesan Guidelines for Congregations in Counties Approved to move to Phase 1

- In-person worship can continue, with all state and relevant county requirements met.
- In all circumstances, a congregation may not be more open in its policies than the requirements contained in their county's approved Phase 1 Plan, regardless of the State's requirements. For example, the current state guideline allows gatherings of up to 25 people. If a county plan, however allows for gatherings of only up to 10 people, then the county plan must be followed.
- Should a congregation or clergy wish to be more restrictive than the requirements contained in their county's approved Phase 1 Plan, the Diocese fully supports that decision.

In order for a congregation to begin to reengage with their building and in-person worship, it must submit a plan to the Bishop, at Bishop@diocese-oregon.org. That plan should include:

1. Commitment by the clergy and lay leaders that the congregation plan is not more permissive than the approved county plan.
2. Outline how other guidelines, recommendations and suggestions are being implemented. The specific strategies may differ to address the needs and conditions in each congregation, but the plan should include a section that addresses:
 - Protection of vulnerable populations (over 60 or those with pre-existing health condition)
 - Adherence to physical distancing expectations in circumference, while in church, and entering and exiting. This includes plans for whether or not the Eucharist is offered and how the sacrament is distributed.
 - Limits on number of people gathered
 - Plans for how music will be offered
 - Cleaning, sanitizing space before and after use
 - Reduction of likely transmission due to touched surfaces
 - Compliance of all requirements for any external users, if permitted

Beyond following the guidelines of the state's and each county's guidelines, each congregation will need to develop a plan to address the unique needs, conditions and capacity of each congregation. As your bishop, I encourage you to keep as your primary focus, Jesus' commandment to love God, love ourselves, and love our neighbors. To that end, I encourage you to develop a plan that is unique, creative, responsive to your community, and safe. In all circumstances, you need to be at least as safe as the government leaders have dictated. And in all circumstances, I fully support any decision to be more cautious, slow and careful. Below are some considerations for your congregational plan.

So we can keep track of questions, plans and responses, please send everything to bishop@diocese-oregon.org. Thank you.

Baptism

An in-person service of baptism may be conducted. In doing so the following conditions need to be met: Physical distancing of 6 feet between family groups; use of face masks; use of new, clean water for any baptism.

Baptismal Fonts

Wherever possible, all baptismal fonts are to be drained to discourage parishioners from dipping hands in water.

Bulletins

To reduce the number of surfaces on which the virus can be transmitted, consideration should be given to eliminate paper bulletins or scripture inserts. Digital copies could be distributed, or boards could be used to display information.

Children in Church

While children under age 2 should not have a face mask, all other children should follow the expectations of physical distancing and use of masks. If this cannot be managed, you may wish to suspend child care and Sunday School.

Cleaning – Deep Cleaning

Deep clean your entire church including pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, stair railings, microphones, and all heavily, often-touched surfaces. Consider removing all non-essential items, including Books of Common Prayer and Hymnals, from rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.

Cleaning – Routine

Surfaces should be cleaned immediately before and after use, including pews, countertops, kitchen areas, electronics, doorknobs, push bars, armrests.

Choir

Singing provides a sustained, exceptional method of carrying virus particulates in the air. I recommend that choirs be suspended until Phase 3. If however, you wish to continue your choir ministry, the following conditions should be met: Physical distancing of 10 feet is recommended between all musicians; face masks required; no singers in vulnerable populations (over 60 or underlying health concern); and 30 feet distance between the choir and others.

Coffee Hour

No home prepared food, no common trays. Cups, plates and utensils should be disposable, and new items should be used for more food or beverage. Physical distancing must be maintained, and face coverings worn except when eating or drinking.

Communion

Use of the common cup is to be suspended through at least Phase 2 and perhaps longer. Communion is to be offered in one kind, bread only, and should be administered to as few people as possible, preferably by the officiant with a face mask, and who should wash and sanitize their hands as often as possible while distributing the bread.

Contact Tracing

If someone in your community contracts COVID, you should notify parishioners and anyone with who that person came into contact. If so, how will you identify those people? Some communities around the united states are creating seating charts, others are taking reservations, while others are finding volunteers to create a list of attendees for each gathering.

Eucharist

Bishop Hanley is in conversation with other Bishops regarding the theology of Eucharist, to continue to explore how we might move forward. Information will be shared as it is available.

Eucharistic Visitors

The practice of sending Eucharistic Visitors should be suspended. Home visits should be restricted to clergy. No visits should be undertaken by clergy in vulnerable populations.

Feeding Programs

Physical distancing must be maintained. If any attendee is sick, they should be segregated from healthy attendees. Consider having someone onsite to take temperatures with a digital heat thermometer before attendees come into a space with a feeding program.

Food Service

No home prepared meals or snacks should be provided. All potlucks should be cancelled, and any food served should be prepared and purchased at a commercial food outlet, preferably prepackaged or individually wrapped.

Funeral

An in-person funeral service can be conducted but limited to 25 persons, and with physical distancing of 6 feet. All attending the funeral should use face masks. Graveside services are encouraged. Prior approval from the Bishop is required.

Greeters

Physical contact must be discontinued. Greeters should not shake hands as people enter, and should hold the door, to reduce contact of door handles.

Hand sanitizer & Wipes

Hand sanitizer should be provided at all entrances to any place where people will congregate. If sanitizer is not available, rubbing alcohol of 70% or more can be used. Provide disposable wipes to community members, in case they wish to wipe down the area where they sit.

If someone gets sick

If someone gets sick during or after a time of gathering, you may need to close any in-person gathering, and reenter a more restrictive phase.

Information

Everything contained in these guidelines are the best thinking as of the date of publication. Please stay informed about the status of your county and the state. Several resources are included in the next section.

Offering

The offering plate should not be passed from hand to hand. Some alternatives include placing the plate in a single location, have parishioners come to the plate, or to have ushers take the plate to each person or family group.

Passing the peace

Physical contact must be discontinued and discouraged. In addition to the option of no-contact greetings, the Peace could be shared immediately before or after the words of invitation. (see page 407 in the BCP)

Prayer Books

Because the virus remains active on surfaces, the items that are touched should be removed from the pews. Congregants are encouraged to bring their own Book of Common Prayer.

Outside users

Because the responsibility of assuring compliance in a parish rests with the parish leadership, please assure you have a method of keeping the users of your building, along with the parishioners who subsequently use the space safe and healthy. You may want to provide outside users a copy of your reopening plan and require them to sign in consent.

Parish Schools and Day Schools

We believe these should follow state, NAIS, or SAES guidelines for reopening and ought to be and the board. These protocols must comply with State guidelines, which have not been released. Explicit approval must be obtained from Bishop to resume.

Physical Distancing

In Executive Order 20-12, Governor Kate Brown outlined that when people leave their homes, they should at all times maintain 6 feet distance between any person not in their immediate household, and comply with other [social distancing guidance issued by the Oregon Health Authority](#). As spaces are reengaged, attention should be given to the number of people that can fit in the space, maintaining 6 feet separation.

Plans

Consider using this time to develop or refine your community's plans to stay connected, provide ongoing care and services, maintain operational continuity for your staff and those you serve, and to partner in your community.

Restrooms

Physical distancing and cleaning must be followed in restrooms. If you cannot assure safety measures are followed, consider keeping restrooms closed.

Signage

Signs should be posted at the entrance of occupied spaces. Signs can be found here: <https://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19>

Singing

Singing provides a sustained, exceptional method of carrying virus particulates in the air. Because of this congregational singing is prohibited.

Testing

All clergy and staff should either have a molecular test done to see if they have the virus, or antibody test to see if they have had the virus and now have immunity. We recommend the antibody test.

Ushers

Ushers should be trained to understand the regulations about physical distancing, group limit, and other safety components of your plan. They may be used to help assure safety. Ushers should not be from vulnerable populations.

Vacation Bible School

These must comply with State guidelines for educational and summer programs, which have not yet been released. Explicit approval must be obtained from Bishop to resume, and commitment that proposal is no more liberal than county or state.

Volunteers

No volunteer should be required to be face-to-face, especially if they are considered a vulnerable population. Volunteers should be limited to those under 60 and those without pre-existing health conditions.

Vulnerable Populations

In Oregon, vulnerable populations is defined as anyone over age 60, or those with underlying health condition. These populations should be encouraged to continue to Stay Home, while every effort should be made to continue to include them in meaningful worship experiences as we reengage our space.

Weddings

A wedding can be conducted but limited to the number approved by the county plan, and with physical distancing of 6 feet. All attending the wedding should use face masks. Prior approval, either included in the overall Reopening Plan, or approval for a specific celebration is needed.

What we know about the State of Oregon's phased plan

The State of Oregon, like all states, is developing a plan that provides for the phased reopening of the State. In Oregon, the state is talking about three phases plus a baseline. However, the specific details of the Governor's plans are only available on the baseline and Phase I, and Governor Brown has indicated that the specifics of Phase 2 and 3 will be developed based on what is learned from previous Phases.

What we know: the Current Governmental Plan as stated by the Office of the Governor

Until a county is granted permission to enter Phase 1, individuals are required to comply with Executive Order 20-12, which requires that all Oregonians, to the maximum extent possible, should stay at home. Worship gatherings of up to 25 people is permitted, as long as all other requirements can be met, including 6 feet physical distancing. Individuals are prohibited from behavior inconsistent with guidance from Oregon Health Authority (OHA).

What we know: Phase I

Governor Brown will consider each county's request to move to Phase 1. Any number of business will reopen and/or readjust how they are doing business while meeting of appropriate social distancing guidelines and other stipulations designed to limit exposure to the virus.

When a county meets the prerequisites, each is submitting a plan to the State to consider. All of these plans, and their approval status is contained at this website: <https://govstatus.egov.com/or-covid-19>

What we know: Phases 2 & 3

Phase 2 will happen after a county has experienced at least 21 days without a reversion to previous problems (hospitalizations, deaths, testing and hospital capacity). It is likely that Phase 2 will increase the number of people allowed in gatherings, although the specific number has not been released. Again, in phase 2 it is to be expected that businesses will make changes in how they operate based on the specifics of the detail in the governors announcement of that phase. Phase 3 will occur only when there is either reliable treatment or prevention is available. It is unknown when this will be. It is recommended that all large gatherings should be cancelled or significantly modified at least through September.

State of Oregon's Phase-In Chart

The following table summarizes what is known about Governor Brown's phased reopening plan. As you can tell, much of the information beyond Phase 1 is unknown and dependent upon experiences and data from Phase 1.

	Current	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Vulnerable populations guidance	Stay home, Stay Healthy	Stay home, Stay Healthy	Stay Home, Stay Healthy	Stay Home, Stay Healthy
Local Faith Gatherings	Up to 25	Up to 25	TENTATIVE – in person local gatherings up to 100, SUBJECT TO CHANGE	<p>Details not yet provided.</p> <p>Concerts conventions, festivals, live audience sports won't be possible until a reliable treatment or prevention is available. It is unknown at this time when this will be.</p> <p>All large gatherings should be cancelled or significantly modified through at least September. Further guidance on large gatherings scheduled for later in the fall will be provided in the summer.</p>
Childcare	Open with priority for essential workers, #'s TBD	Open with priority for essential workers, #'s tbd	TBD Details not provided. Will require at least 21 days meeting prerequisites of Phase I.	
Visits to Nursing Homes/Hospitals		Very limited.	Goal is to further expand gathering size, allow some office work, begin to allow visitation to congregate care.	
Summer school, camp	Open with physical distancing	Open with physical distancing, cohort TBD	Details will be based on data collected in Phase	

In Oregon, a vulnerable population is defined as anyone over age 60, and those with underlying health condition.

Resources

Reopening Oregon: A Framework: State of Oregon

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JM2dwYVK4Y4IBxMT6Si5-H_LNua52tnu/view

State of Oregon COVID Signs <https://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19>

[Church Insurance Companies: Coronavirus Safety Tips for Religious Organizations](#)

[Connection in the Midst of an Epidemic](#): Episcopal Relief & Development has created a guide to staying connected with your community in the midst of an epidemic.

[eFormation](#): Virginia Theological Seminary's eFormation page has info and support for equipping you for digital ministries.

<https://domesticworkers.org/?fbclid=IwAR0dni3UgcCbjrBGbCYWJdSYBoI>

<https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/public-charge>

Covid Resources in Spanish https://espanol.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Findex-sp.html

Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives, US Dept of Health Human Services – [Covid Recommended Preventative Practices and FAQs for Faith-based and Community Leaders](#)

[Reopening Congregations and Ministries in COVID-19](#) – ELCA Oregon Synod – A useful checklist that might be used to consider options