



Guidelines and Parameters for Regathering

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Guidelines and Parameters for Regathering: Phase Two

First and foremost, as you read this document, please understand that although it says what must be in place so you CAN begin regathering, it does not say that you MUST begin regathering. We note that attending church during this phase will be radically different from what parishioners are used to—no distribution of Communion elements, no singing, no touching, no nursery, no Sunday School, no fellowship after worship.) THIS IS A TEMPORARY, BUT NECESSARY, PHASE. We all want to get back to in-person worship as soon as possible, and as soon as is safe. This is not home, this restricted phase is not the goal, but it is a small step on the way back.

Should you decide to begin regathering in your buildings in this fashion, be prepared for the inevitable feelings of disappointment that this doesn't "feel like church." Some parishes may decide to forgo regathering in this phase for a variety of reasons (demographics of congregation, limitations of physical facility, vulnerability factors for the clergy or for parishioners, among others). Your diocesan leaders support you whether or not you decide to begin to regather at this time.

The following is a set of guidelines and parameters that will help you discern whether and/or when to submit a petition for regathering.

I. PUBLIC HEALTH MARKERS

Why do public health markers matter? The ability to assess how rapidly the virus is spreading in our communities shows us the level of risk that is present for our congregants, should we regather. Further, it shows how the medical system in our area is capable of supporting new cases. Since those who are admitted to hospitals as a result of COVID-19 often require intensive medical intervention, and since there is a limit to the number of patients our hospitals

can effectively treat, the goal is to limit the increase in numbers of cases. Thus, having a seven-day-long period of decline in new cases and in deaths shows that we are stressing the medical system less, that the possibility of transmission may be declining, and that we may consider whether it is time for us to begin to gather with some very careful protocols in place. This relies on the availability of tests, of course, and contact tracing, so that we have accurate data in that seven-day trend analysis.

These are the key public health markers that had been named by the Bishops of Virginia as requirements for regatherin:

- “7-day consecutive decline in numbers of people testing positive for COVID-19, hospitalizations, and intensive care bed use.
- Widespread testing.
- Contact tracing available to track the spread of the virus.
- Sufficient supply of personal protective equipment.
- Evidence that our health care systems have sufficient equipment and are not overwhelmed by the number of cases.”¹

Our state is quite large and the distribution of cases varies widely, so looking at the data in your locality gives a clearer understanding of the risk inherent in regathering in your community.

Further, over the past year we have learned that simpler is better: the one data point which is the most crucial marker for safety in regathering is the number of new cases. To give greater clarity to the level of risk, knowing that our Diocese is very diverse in terms of context, we look at the number of daily new cases per 100,000 over a 7-day rolling average.

County-by-county data can be found [here](#). You will be asked about this in your petition to re-gather, so please check to see if your locality has met the threshold in terms of new cases. In considering your petition to regather, the

¹ <http://www.thediocese.net/news/a-letter-from-the-bishops-of-the-dioceses-of-virginia-washington-dc-and-marylan/>

Bishop will determine if the other public health markers have been met to a sufficient degree that you may proceed.

Note that the Bishop may add restrictions to regathering in congregations (or the Diocese as a whole) if risk factors change and merit such action.

II. PLAN

A. Overview of Requirements that Will Guide Your Planning

- No touching; physical distancing required at all times.
- Wearing masks (required of everyone above the age of two). The celebrant or officiant and lectors may remove masks briefly when they speak but must put the masks back on after they are done speaking.
- Good hygiene practices.
- Strong sanitation practices.
- No one who feels ill, whether or not they are diagnosed with COVID-19, should come to church.
- No distribution of the Eucharist. It is the priest's choice whether or not the priest will consume the bread. Spiritual communion for all is acceptable.
- No singing, nor use of wind or brass instruments. Organ, guitar, or piano may be used, but there will be no congregational singing, so they should be used judiciously. Even the use of solo singers creates a level of risk. Unless the solo singer is in a location no less than six feet distant from another other person in any direction, a soloist cannot perform in this phase.
- Alternatives to pew books provided.
- Online or telephonic worship still provided.
- Plans, communication, and signage all support these requirements.

B. Understanding your demographics

Identify, to the extent possible, those parishioners who fall into the CDC's definition of [People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness](#). It is a wise and useful exercise to determine the percentages of your parishioners who fall into one or more of these categories. The percentages alone may suggest that it is too soon to regather, or that particular considerations need to be in place to proceed.

Clergy should contact parishioners who fall into the higher risk category to have a pastoral conversation that encourages them to make a wise choice about coming back to church, reminding them that they can continue attending online worship.

C. Thinking about your physical facility

For your Narthex, remove materials that you normally distribute in that area. This could include things like directories, this month's newsletter, leaflets, promotional flyers, and Forward Day by Day. Anything that would encourage a parishioner to linger there and anything that someone might pick up that has been touched by someone else is unhelpful at this time.

For your Nave, remove all hymnals, BCPs, Bibles, or other printed materials from the pews.

Secure disinfecting products, hand sanitizer stations, masks and gloves. Masks will be required for all attending worship services, and should also be worn by staff while at the office. The latter three will be available both to parishioners and staff, so determine where they should be located. Have a restocking plan so there will be no interruption of your work in the months to come.

Do an initial disinfecting deep cleaning of the Nave. Do the same for restrooms that will be available during worship times.

Develop a cleaning protocol and schedule for the worship space as well as for other areas which may be open to staff or to other groups.

Disable all water fountains.

If applicable in your space, identify any windows that might be opened for cross-ventilation and address any maintenance issues that would prevent them from being opened safely. Another option, if you have air conditioning, is to make sure that the fan operates continuously throughout the service.

For office areas, reconfigure as necessary to meet physical distancing guidelines (currently six feet in all directions). Continue to encourage employees to work from home to the extent practicable.

Develop a cleaning protocol and schedule for all office spaces.

Measure out your worship space to ensure that attendees (either cohabiting family groups or individuals) are spaced at least six feet apart in all directions. Calculate how many persons you would be able to accommodate. Develop a plan for how you will manage those numbers to prevent potential attendees from exceeding the space. This might require holding multiple services, grouping attendance by alphabet (for example, all whose last names begin with letters A-G will attend on the First Sunday After Pentecost, letters H-N on the Second...), or using a reservation system such as EventBrite. With registration systems, consider leaving a few open seats to allow for walk-ins and newcomers. You might also find that your parish hall is a better option than the Nave. See Appendix A for the Rev. Deacon Katherine Ferguson's detailed explanation of how she calculates capacity and what to consider vis-à-vis space.

If you are providing a feeding ministry and/or a food bank, continue following the protocols defined by your local health department, and make sure you are disinfecting the areas where these ministries are active (kitchen, storage area, distribution point, restrooms for volunteers). If there are partner ministries that you expect will use your space in Phase Two as they had in the past, make sure you are disinfecting the areas where these ministries are active (kitchen, storage area, distribution point, restrooms for volunteers). There is a more detailed discussion [here](#) of a comprehensive plan for appropriate cleaning of the relevant areas, as you will do in the church and the office spaces.

While there is no requirement to operate a temperature check station, if you elect to use one, you must have: (i) trained personnel to do this, (ii) appropriate and sufficient PPE and hygiene supplies available at the station, and (iii) a protocol for what will happen if someone has a temperature above your defined level².

D. Planning for Worship

Since there will be no prayer books and hymnals in the pews, you will need to consider how to guide attendees through the worship service. Your bulletin may need to be expanded to include the entire service, not just an outline. Since there will be no congregational singing at this point³, the full order of service will be somewhat shorter than those that include hymns. For those churches that have the capability of projecting their order of worship on a screen, that is helpful for most parishioners, with the exception of those who have some level of visual impairment. Test the technology ahead of time to see if it is readable and if shifting from one page to another can be done smoothly. Alternatively, prepare to have printed orders of service that include all that is

² The level of temperature that defines fever is generally considered to be 100.4°F, per the CDC and WHO.

³ See the following articles:

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6919e6.htm?s_cid=mm6919e6_e&deliveryName=USCDC_921-DM28169; immunologist Erin Bromage's excellent article here: <https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>; <https://oklahoman.com/article/5662348/covid-19-could-mute-church-singing>

necessary to participate in worship. Have a place where these orders of service will be placed for attendees to pick up as they enter the service, and ensure that there is a touchless recycling receptacle at the exit for proper disposal. Orders of service should not be reused, but recycled as attendees leave the church. A hint: if you and a few other parishes in your region are all doing printed materials and the same type of worship service, the preparation of the digital document might be shared. Then each parish simply duplicates the document.

Regarding entry and exit, if possible, designate an entrance door and an exit door, and prepare signs to indicate flow. Consider putting painters' tape on your aisles to indicate what six feet looks like to those entering and exiting the worship space. Mark out seating locations, so as to maintain six feet of distance in all directions.

Decide if you are using a reservation tool like EventBrite to manage the number of attendees or an alternative, such as limiting attendance alphabetically (although this does not provide as clear a way to determine if you will exceed your capacity as a reservation system will do). Always leave a few spaces (perhaps between three and five) for newcomers/seekers. Consider adding a service to accommodate your number of potential attendees. When estimating the number of congregants on a Sunday, keep in mind that a significant population will not return to worship for some time for various reasons.

Prepare your ushers and any greeting volunteers who will be key to this process. See Appendix B for a list of useful things they might be responsible for.

Determine the location of hygiene stations, how you will train your ushers, and how you will communicate to your parish what the protocols for worship will look like at this phase. As mentioned before, it will not look like "regular church."

E. Thinking about Partner Ministries

If another worshipping community is using your space, they must follow the same guidelines that are required for your worship, including sanitation, hygiene, distancing, numbers, and limitations in physical contact.

If there are other programmatic partners such as Scouts, twelve-step groups, or emergency housing, they must follow the same guidelines for physical distancing and sanitation and physical contact.

Day care and preschools that want to resume operations are required to follow diocesan guidelines as well as the guidelines of the local health department⁴. We strongly recommend against resuming day care and preschools, unless there is a particular community they serve that will be severely hampered by their continued closing, such as service to children of front-line workers. Please be in touch with the Bishop to consult on such situations.

⁴ Maintaining physical distancing with young children is extraordinarily difficult. Little ones are also known vectors of the virus, and are capable of being infected, sometimes with dire results.

III. COMMUNICATE

Your **parishioners** will need to know what worship will look like, what the protocols will be to reduce risk, and how they can (and cannot) participate. They will also need to know what online or telephonic worship services are (and will continue to be) available to them. They will need to know what provisions are being made for pastoral care and for pastoral offices such as funerals, weddings and baptisms. The Bishop will send out specific guidance on pastoral offices that will serve as a companion document to this one.

If you as a priest are unable to lead in-person worship because of physical vulnerabilities and you are the only cleric on staff, convey that worship will continue online.

Your **staff** will need to know expectations about being in the office (guidance to work remotely wherever possible remains in place) and about caring for themselves and those they come into contact with in their workplace.

Your **worship volunteers** will need to know which ministries will be active and in what capacity (ushers, lectors, choristers, altar guild, prayer team) and how they should do their work during this phase. Given the passion that these volunteers have for their ministry, expect some disappointment. If your volunteers fall into a vulnerable age bracket or are vulnerable for other reasons, encourage them to step away from that ministry for this phase and be prepared to provide pastoral care in response.

Your **partner ministries** will need to know if, when and how they can resume and under what restrictions. If they are unable or unwilling to follow the protocols set forth, they may need to wait until a later phase of regathering to re-enter the church buildings.

N.B. Other churches in your area may be regathering with little to no restrictions. That is their choice. We choose differently, out of loving concern for all members

of the Body of Christ. If there is resistance on the part of parishioners, direct them to [Bishop Goff's guidance](#) for a clear picture of why we are doing this, along with many other faith communities around Virginia and around the nation.

IV. EXECUTE

Invariably, despite all the planning you do, there may be surprises – both good and bad – along the way. Flexibility is key. If you need to change a protocol, assuming it would not put you out of line with diocesan guidelines, change the protocol. If you need to make a hard decision, such as once again halting in-person worship because an attendee or a staffer is diagnosed with COVID-19, know that we will support you in that. Appendix D of this document provides guidance for procedures if there is contact with someone who is diagnosed with COVID-19 at your church.

If you have done your planning work well, though, and if you have communicated it to the people who need to know, now is the time to execute your plan. Make sure there is adequate signage. Make sure there are adequate supplies. Make sure the ushers are ready. Make sure that you remember that there were those who were dissatisfied in one way or another before and there will be those who are dissatisfied now, and that everyone is doing the best that they can.

Just as a recap, here's the short list of requirements:

- No touching and physical distancing at all times
- Wearing masks (required of everyone above the age of two.)
- Good hygiene practices.
- Strong sanitation practices.
- No one who feels ill, whether or not they are diagnosed with COVID-19, should come to church.

- No distribution of the Eucharist. Priest's call whether or not they consume the bread. Spiritual communion for all is acceptable.
- No singing, nor use of wind or brass instruments. Organ, guitar, or piano may be used, but there will be no congregational singing, so they should be used judiciously.
- Alternatives to pew books provided.
- Online or telephonic worship still provided.
- Plans, communication, and signage all support these requirements.

Remember that you have Area Coaching Teams who will help you in putting together your plan; they can give you ideas to help execute it. They have been trained to help you and are at your service. You can do this; you have already done so much, so well, and we have confidence in your work.

Please fill out the Petition Form, attaching supporting documents as appropriate to share your plan, and send it in so the Petition Review Team can take a look and make recommendations to you and to the Bishop. Thank you and God bless you!

APPENDIX A – Calculating Space

The Rev. Deacon Katherine Ferguson’s Calculation of Capacity of Seating Meeting Physical Distancing Requirements

This may feel more complex than you are willing to take on for your parish, but it provides a list of a number of considerations as you determine what would be safe for your space. If you want to ask her to calculate it for your sanctuary using her model, contact her at ladiakonakatherine@gmail.com

Assumptions:

- Depth of the seat is not required as people are free to use the entire front-to-back space (Stand, sit, kneel as the feel called).
- Seat width about 20” unless measurements dictate otherwise.
- All seats face one direction:
 - This modeling might not be suitable for parishes with “box” seating
 - More conventional pews, even ones with doors will fit the current model.
- Multiple blocks of seating arrayed in portions of circles or South, West, and North blocks facing an Easterly or central can be modeled (think Washington National Cathedral, VTS Immanuel Chapel, or St. Anne’s Reston which has 4 section in a fan array) would also not necessarily fit this kind of modeling.

Examples can be provided in both plan view (bird’s eye view) and 3D model view.

A photo or two is helpful, or if you have interior pictures on your web site, but not required.

Required measurements (per section):

- Left aisle width
- Left seating width in feet and, if used, number of chairs
- Center aisle width

- Right seating width in feet and, if used, number of chairs
- Right aisle width
- Distance from the front of one row, to the front of the row behind. Not shown in the example, but in this case it is 2' 10" (34 inches). The row depth itself is 2' with 10 inches of passage space.

Nice to have, but not required:

- Placement of entrance and exit doors can provide more information and allow better modeling. You may have this readily at hand with a drawing used for a fire escape plan. Copy or photo can be beneficial.
- Distance from Front of kneeler to communion rail.
- Photo of seating area from both front and side

I only modeled people in one row. It dramatically shows the few number of people and families that may be present in a church for a worship service and still maintain 6' separation, which is why the leftmost seat for the seating on the right of the main aisle is not allowed, as it would be within 6 feet of a person in the rightmost seat of the left section. Having individual seats like Santa Maria, does not allow people to slide apart or together so distancing is easier. All of this REQUIRES that the ushers know what they are doing and the people COOPERATE and not say that, "I only sit in the second row!" when that row is blocked off. It will take discipline.

Worst case seating is based on unrelated individuals, where no one can sit together. Best case is a family is large enough to occupy all the available seating area in a row. Reasonable assumption is between these. Worst case for our parish is 24, but that is not realistic.

The example below is in both plan view and 3d Model for Santa Maria. Only the RED seats are used in this; 53 out of 288 available seats. All movement is down the side aisles, the main aisle is blocked off. This would require that people arriving first, would necessarily need to be seated in the front and filled from front to back to preclude anyone from being within 6' of another person. Dismissal would be by rows, starting at the back and then moving towards the front.

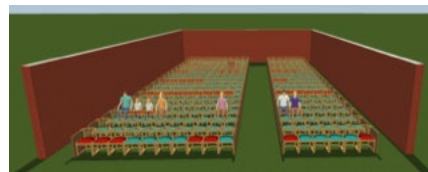
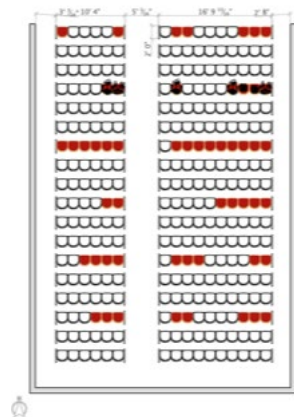
Also, if many people and families wanted to come to church, they would have to call in advance to schedule which service (if the church provides multiple services) they would like to attend and how many in the IMMEDIATE family group (those physically living together - which for our parish could get really difficult!). The names would then be drawn by lottery, say Friday morning, and the seat assignments could be estimated. People would be notified during the day on Friday. People requesting 4 seats and then arriving with MORE people could jeopardize the entire layout.

It would be impossible to assign the seats because if the first people to arrive were assigned to the back row, no one else could pass and still maintain the distancing. This would require the warning that, “Due to when people arrive, and how they are seated, even those who have been notified that they will have a seat, may be denied if the seating needs to be changed on-the-fly.

It is fairly easy to model with a minimum of measurements. In this case,

- Left aisle width
- Left seating width in feet and, if used number of chairs
- Center aisle width
- Right seating width in feet and, if used number of chairs
- Right aisle width
- Distance from the the front of one row, to the front of the row behind. Not shown, but in this case it is 2’ 10” (34 inches). The row itself is 2’ with 10 inches of passage space.

Here are modeling samples for Iglesia Santa Maria:



APPENDIX B – Ushers/Greeters

Training Ushers and/or Greeters

Before worship:

- Prop open entrance doors, if possible.
- Disinfect all door knobs and restroom light switches.
- Place bulletins near entrances for congregants to pick up themselves.
- Disinfect door handles repeatedly and consistently.
- Place hand sanitizer, masks, and for congregants to pick up themselves.
- Place offering receptacle(s) in visible location(s).

Keep track of the number of attendees to ensure maximum capacity is not violated.

Guide attendees (while social distancing) to available seats, keeping in mind size of household. There should be no open seating.

Seat attendees in available spaces from front to back as they enter, and guide them out from back to front as they exit, always maintaining six feet of distance in all directions.

Attendees should be advised to remain in the area where they are seated until the service is over and an usher guides them to the designated exit, inasmuch as is possible, to maintain appropriate social distancing at all times.

Ask people displaying symptomatic behavior to kindly leave.

Provide recycling bins for attendees to discard used bulletins as they exit. Used bulletins should not be reused for subsequent services.

Disinfect door handles and other contact surfaces after the service ends.

Printed checklists of the above protocols are kept current as a record for liability purposes. See Appendix C of this document for a sample disinfecting checklist.

APPENDIX C – Disinfecting Checklist

List of touch surfaces to be disinfected for Sunday worship:

- Door to women’s restroom
- Light switches in women’s restroom
- Faucet handles in women’s restroom
- Stall doors and toilet handles
- Door to men’s restroom
- Light switches in men’s restroom
- Faucet handles in men’s restroom
- Stall doors and toilet handles
- Altar rail
- Backs of pews
- Pew cushions of used areas
- Light switch(es) for worship space
- Interior door to Nave
- Light switches for Narthex or Chapel
- Entrance door handles (outside and inside)

Date: _____

Time of day completed: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D - Emergency Protocols

Should a parishioner or any other person who has come to your church (i.e. visitors to a partner ministry) develop COVID-19, or should a staffer or clergy person come into contact with someone with the virus, the wisdom now being shared is this:

- Close and lock the building
- Arrange for disinfection of all of the areas where the person might have been. Current guidance is to wait 24 hours between closing the building and allowing the professional cleaning team enter to disinfect.
- Determine who may have had direct contact with the ailing person (first degree contact). Anyone who had direct contact should be tested for the virus and should self-quarantine until knowing the test results.
- Determine who had contact with the persons who had direct contact (second degree contact). There are two options for these persons: (i) immediately self-quarantine, or (ii) wait until they understand the test results of those who had first-degree contact. Obviously, the safer plan is to self-quarantine immediately. It is the decision of the Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Vicar which of these options will be followed. In instances where a staff member is involved, there shall be no case in which this person is penalized if s/he wants to take the more cautious option.
- In consultation with the company that disinfects the areas, determine how long the building should remain closed to all.
- Communicate with parishioners that this has happened, that the affected areas are being thoroughly disinfected, and that you will announce when the building will reopen. Encourage parishioners who have been in the building to let the senior cleric know if they have been diagnosed. As always, encourage those who feel ill to stay at home and consult their own physician.

This protocol is based on the current guidelines offered by health experts in late May of 2020. This may change as we learn more about the transmissibility of the virus and about necessary protective steps.