



A Time of Challenge and Change

A Plan for Churches during a Pandemic

May 15, 2020

From the Bishops

Grace and peace, dear people of God, as we enter a new stage of our life together in response to the coronavirus and in the context of the new life that is promised to us in the resurrection of Jesus. To paraphrase the words of St. Paul: Now may our God and Father, and the Lord Jesus, direct our way... And may the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all. I Thess. 3:12

First, a word of thanks for your faithfulness, creativity, ingenuity, resilience, mutual support and unwavering commitment to the Good News of the Gospel and to living into the promise of Becoming Beloved Community. The past nine weeks have shown clearly the ways the spirit is moving among us and through us as we continue to serve our churches, our communities and our neighbors as part of God's mission.

The next few months may be the most challenging yet. To help us prepare and plan for the next stages of our life together, a team of 16 people from across the Diocese, along with your bishops and diocesan staff, have explored five areas of our common life as we ready ourselves for a return to public worship in our buildings.

This return will take place in stages guided by directives from federal, state and local authorities and roughly will mirror the phases of the state's movement, based on public health indicators. However, the special quality of our life together means our work and ministry is guided also by our gospel values and our pastoral sensibilities, our firm faith in God's abiding presence with us and our care for the most vulnerable among us. At times, the choices and decisions we make for the Diocese may differ from governmental directives. We will be clear about when and why this is the case.

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We have consulted with the other bishops in North Carolina and agree that each diocesan context is a bit different, and so our guidelines and directives are focused within our respective dioceses.

It is with all this in mind we now present the following directives in these five areas:

- Worship/Sunday Mornings/Formation
- Pastoral Offices and Visits (including baptisms, weddings, ministry at the time of death and funerals)
- Direct Services and Outside Groups
- Protection/Prevention/Equipment/Cleaning Practices
- Advocacy

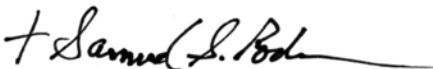
The guidelines we offer correspond to the respective reopening phases and chart the stages for our return to full public worship. We do not have a complete timetable, but we continue to be guided by the latest information and data; these guidelines and directives may need to be updated as the pandemic continues to unfold.

The work in these five areas is guided by the reopening phases the State of North Carolina has identified and has been informed by the experience of some nearby dioceses, especially Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. (These dioceses have generously allowed us to use and adapt some of their materials.) But our particular sequence and timing is based on what we believe is best for the people of the Diocese of North Carolina.

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Again, we are grateful for your partnership in this changing and challenging landscape. We embrace the opportunities before us for the church to reimagine our mission and faithful response, even as we grieve the loss of life and the loss of some of the familiar patterns that have marked our common life for so long.

As we take these next steps together, we recognize, like the travelers on the Emmaus road, that Jesus is journeying with us. We hear the voice of our Good Shepherd guiding us along our path and leading us to signs of hope. We hear the invitation to cast our nets, again, on the other side of the boat. We know the promise of the Holy Spirit to both comfort us and to set our hearts on fire with the love that transforms us and equips us for the next stages of our journey.



The Right Reverend Sam Rodman
Bishop, Diocese of North Carolina



The Right Reverend Anne Hodges-Copple
Bishop Suffragan, Diocese of North Carolina

Stages of Reopening Church Buildings for Worship

STAGE ONE: COPING WITH CRISIS

Until at least July 1* (Our current situation)

Public Health Indicators (PHI): Rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths are rising.

- Church offices remained closed to non-essential personnel, and, whenever possible, work takes place from home.
- Congregations continue to hold virtual worship, livestreamed and/or recorded, while wearing masks. If livestreaming, a total of 6 people, including the camera operator, may gather to conduct worship. Participants will maintain 6 feet of physical distance between members of different households.
- Use of the common cup remains suspended. Communion is to be offered in one kind, bread only, and should be administered by the celebrant alone. Wine will be consecrated by the celebrant but not consumed during the service. Following the service, the normal practices of the parish will be followed concerning the consecrated wine and bread.
- Bible studies, coffee hours, social gatherings, meetings and other small group activities take place via telephone or online.
- Graveside services of 10 or fewer people observing physical distancing are allowed.
- Weddings and baptisms remain suspended, except by permission of the bishop.
- Pastoral care takes place via telephone or online. All home visits remain suspended.
- Continued ministries of service and compassion take place within protocols of safety.
- Churches perform first assessments of the economic impact on members of the congregations and wider community, including preliminary adjustments to budgets and ministry goals.

STAGE TWO: TURNING THE CORNER

Tentatively beginning on July 1*

PHI: Rates of cases, hospitalizations and deaths are declining. Testing and tracing are available. Sufficient PPE is available.

- Church offices may reopen in spaces large enough for physical distancing to be maintained, with the requirement that proper sanitation measures be strictly adhered to and enforced, and with proper ventilation.
- Small indoor church worship may restart in spaces large enough for 6 feet of physical distance to be maintained between people from different households. The total number of people present should not exceed 25, including the worship leadership team.
- Outdoor worship for 35 people—with physical distancing—may take place.
- Virtual worship will still be necessary in all congregations to accommodate vulnerable populations and larger worshipping communities.
- If Holy Eucharist is celebrated in this stage, restrictive practices will remain in place.

STAGE TWO: TURNING THE CORNER

Tentatively beginning on July 1*

- Governance and program committees, Bible studies and formation groups of 15 or fewer people might consider meeting in person while wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing, or they may continue to gather online.
- Churches continue to follow health and safety protocols, including using masks at all gatherings, posting signs indicating symptoms, urging people to stay home and seek medical attention if they have symptoms, and recommending prescreening at home.
- Pastoral care visits to those in high-risk categories for contracting the virus remains restricted, as do pastoral care visits by clergy and lay visitors in high-risk categories.
- In-person Vacation Bible School is not a good idea this year, and mission trips are inadvisable.
- Care for the most vulnerable, engagement with those assessing the societal impact of the pandemic and advocacy for justice continue.
- Churches perform next-level assessments of the pandemic's impact on members of the congregation and community, forecast necessary long-term adjustments of ministry initiatives and explore collaborative partnerships.
- All levels of church leadership need to lead with knowledge and information to help our people cope with the changing nature of the phased community approach our health leaders will be taking.

We strongly recommend that each church create a plan and set of protocols for Stage 2 by June 15. If you have questions about your plan and need assistance, please contact Canon David Sellery, Canon Rhonda Lee, Canon Earnest Graham, Missioner Daniel Robayo, or Missioner Kathy Walker.

STAGE THREE: LEADING RECOVERY

Date to be Determined*

PHI: Case, hospitalization and deaths are near zero. Widespread testing and tracing are available. Health care systems have the capacity to manage all in need.

- Restrictions are eased on office and classroom gatherings, within sanitation and ventilation guidelines previously noted in Stage 2.
- An increased number of people are allowed for public worship, according to guidelines set by health officials and in consultation with the bishop diocesan.
- Restrictive practices may still guide the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, with gradual easing.
- Continued physical distancing and masking requirements are likely.
- Larger group ministries (youth groups, camps, classes) may resume within established guidelines.
- Churches continue assessments of pandemic impact and prayerful discernment of future ministry.

STAGE FOUR: ADAPTING TO A NEW REALITY

This phase will be marked by diocesan-wide celebration!

PHI: A vaccine is available to the general public. Treatment of proven effectiveness is widely available, as is widespread testing for the virus. Widespread immunity is present in the community.

- There is no limit to the number of worshipers who may attend worship and other activities, except for those who are known to be infectious, are actively sick or who display any of the symptoms of being ill.
- Although we can gather without limitations, worship and meetings continue both in person and virtually.
- Worshipers may wear masks throughout the service, but masks are not required.
- Restrictions on celebrating the Holy Eucharist are lifted.
- Widespread pastoral care is offered.
- Emergency preparedness plans and strategies are in place.
- We move forward with the new practices and ways of doing church that proved fruitful during the pandemic, including:
 - Increased online giving as well as in-person offerings;
 - Fruitful collaborative endeavors;
 - Right-sizing of building use and capacities to meet a growing mission field;
 - Streamlined, efficient use of financial and other resources; and
 - Strategic efforts toward the realization of key strategic missions, visions and goals.

Additional Worship Guidelines for Stage 2

**What is allowed in any stage is not required.
You are free to move more slowly and to restrict any particular item in any stage,
until your and your congregation are ready to move forward.**

GENERAL WORSHIP

Every effort will be made for high-risk individuals, whether staff, volunteers, parishioners or program participants, to continue sheltering in place.

Churches with the resources to do so should continue using technology for online worship and meetings. Diocesan online worship options will continue to be offered for the foreseeable future.

It is appropriate to record worship from inside your church while maintaining appropriate physical distancing (6 feet or more) and for all people to wear masks, regardless of their distance from each other. However, masks are not required for any for any portions of the service prerecorded at home.¹

All sung music should be prerecorded at home. Congregational singing and choir singing are not allowed. Wind instruments are also not allowed. All choir rehearsals, whether traditional choirs or bell choirs, are suspended.²

Organists and pianists may participate in live worship services. They may also accompany a soloist during a prerecorded segment of music, if the organist wears a mask and remains 20 feet from the soloist. After the filming is concluded, no one else may enter the recording space for 30 minutes in order to give any droplets time to dissipate.

People should enter the building staying 6 feet apart from anyone not from their own household. Ushers should help guide physical distancing.

People should sign in and, if required by government and health authorities, have their temperature taken.

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maintaining appropriate physical distancing (6 feet or more) and for
all people to wear masks.***

¹ The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Version 1.0 Distributed 1 May, 2020

² Singing has been identified by the Centers for Disease Control as a particular concern for spreading the infection.

GENERAL WORSHIP

People should bring their own mask and wear it. Churches will provide masks for anyone who does not have one.

People should be encouraged to bring their own Book of Common Prayer to church.

Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home and seek medical attention if they have symptoms.

Cleaning should be done by professionals, when possible. When not possible, volunteers should be properly trained. (See Appendix II: Protection/Prevention/Equipment Practices)

Determine an alternative to passing offertory plates. Think through the options for a central collection point; if you have electronic and text-to-give programs, continue and encourage their use.

Worship leaders cannot greet people at the back of the nave with hand-shaking and hugging; consider what this means and how connections can still occur.

Physical contact is not permitted during the passing of the peace. Alternative greetings, maintaining physical distance, are encouraged.

Drain and sanitize all holy water stoops and baptismal fonts.

Avoid or limit distribution of printed worship materials, unless it has sat untouched for more than 72 hours and can be picked up by individuals without touching other copies. We recommend sending a file to parishioners to print their own.

Flower and altar guilds should organize their work to observe physical distancing and protective protocols.

Acolytes and other servers should observe physical distancing and protective protocols.

If outdoor worship is offered, including the use of a tent, please continue to follow the guidelines outlined in this document, including mask-wearing and physical distancing.

Making plans for drive-in worship may require extensive planning and diminish your capacity to prepare for in-person worship. Drive-in worship services are therefore not allowed.

PASTORAL RITES

Baptisms

It is appropriate to delay baptisms until the community can be together.

If done, this service could be incorporated into the main service video on Sunday, or can it be performed privately.

PASTORAL RITES

Baptisms

When conducting a service of baptism, the number of people involved must be kept within the guidelines for the stage in which the church finds itself (i.e., 25 for stage 2). Additional supporters may participate via video conferencing.

Parents and/or sponsors may NOT perform a baptism, whether or not a priest is in their presence.

However, to minimize contact during an infant baptism, we suggest that the parents hold the baby while the priest, wearing a mask, baptizes with water and touches the infant only for anointing. A shell or other appropriate item should be used for the baptism and cotton swab for the anointing.

An outdoor service—at the entrance to the church, as the traditional place—is also acceptable.

Dispose of water after every baptism.

Confirmations

It is appropriate to delay confirmations until the community can be together.

Regional confirmations will take place once we may gather, in consultation with the bishop's office.

Weddings

Weddings are limited to 25 total participants and guests practicing appropriate physical distancing, with outdoor weddings being preferable. (Up to 35 people are allowed to gather if outdoors.) Additional supporters (except legal witnesses) can attend via video conferencing.

Those being married may stand together, but the minister should maintain 17 feet of distance, unless wearing a mask, in which case only 6 feet of distance need to be maintained.

Consider premarital counseling via video conferencing.

Funerals

Graveside services are allowed within the guidelines already laid out (i.e. 35 or fewer total people gathered, maintaining physical distancing and wearing masks).

We do not recommend funerals in the church building, except in extenuating circumstances and with permission from the bishop.

Consider a rolling bier, instead of carrying a casket, to maintain physical distancing.

Ministry at Time of Death

Priests may not enter health care facilities until phase 3 or 4. Continue to use other methods of pastoral connections, including care via phone and internet or staff chaplains.

Building Guidelines for Stage 2

Consider whether it would be better to hold gatherings virtually rather than in person.

Avoid using common touch items, like keypads, electronic devices and books.

Provide hand sanitizing stations where possible.

Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.

Try to have all doors propped open (if possible) to minimize high surface contact.

Have trashcans near bathroom doors.

Follow guidelines outlined in Appendix II for cleaning between groups (including worship services), paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.

Consider limiting outside groups if cleaning between them is difficult.

Consider the need to re-key buildings to control use.

Draft new building use guidelines and have them signed off by outside group leaders.

Receive permission from the priest, or warden where there is not a priest serving the congregation, before hosting a group or having a meeting.

Keep attendance at worship and meetings, including sign-in sheets and contact information for each individual who attends, and provide directions to group leaders about how to return sign-in sheets to the church office.

If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, put your communication plan into action and cooperate fully with contact tracers.

Communicate clearly items to bring and items that will be provided. Encourage people to bring their own high-touch items (e.g. pens, etc).

Post signs with instructions for norms during this outbreak: wash hands, etc.

Consider holding gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances allow.

Consider offering remote viewing for those who are unwilling or unable to participate in person.

Meeting areas must accommodate 6 feet of space between attendees who do not live in the same household.

Consider the office functions. Limit the number of people who gather, discourage visitors; ensure that everybody wears a mask, and that all surfaces, including the phones, are regularly sanitized. Eliminate overnight retreats or outings.

Design activities in which participants are not in physical contact with one another or sharing common objects (esp. youth and children, arts and crafts, etc).

The above standards also apply to any church group meeting in an alternate location outside the church.

Encourage collaboration with other church and diocesan offerings, especially when opportunities are offered digitally.

Now is the time to renew relationships through small groups, including through continued use of online platforms. Leverage the work you have done in the past two months for mission in the community.

Continue to work with property committees and vestries to maintain and secure your buildings and grounds.

Food Service Guidelines for Stage 2

Coffee hour is not recommended in Stage 2. Give yourself permission to re-introduce coffee hour in a later stage. When you have a coffee hour, carefully think through the highest regard for food safety.

If food is offered at any event, have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee whenever possible, instead of a buffet or family-style meal.

APPENDIX 1: Advocacy

The bishops will create a Council of Advice for Public Policy (CAPP) to recommend appropriate times to address pressing issues with local, state and federal governments and business entities. The group's nonpartisan focus will be on issues consistent with biblical imperatives such as care of creation, works of racial justice and reconciliation, and protecting the dignity of every human being. Priority will be given to vulnerable communities such as the poor, the elderly, children, the sick, prisoners and those who are oppressed, also consistent with the biblical witness.

CAPP will help identify issues and moments around which lay people, deacons, priests and bishops may wish to advocate publicly—individually or as a larger cohort—around an urgent concern and necessary action to protect and defend human life and creation.

CAPP will draw upon existing social justice and environmental networks and diocesan committees' work to guide their recommendations. Resolutions of Annual Convention and General Convention, as well as the work of the Episcopal Public Policy Network and the North Carolina Council of Churches, are resources and will guide the recommendations.

CAPP will advise the bishops on public statements, when requested. It will offer direction as to strategies of engagement such as in-person meetings, letter writing, phone calls, sign-on letters, press release statements, press conferences and public witness, such as marches, to effect positive change in the communities in which we live and serve.

Here are some questions that may guide CAPPs during the pandemic and beyond:

What human needs are most threatened in our various communities, and how might we respond?

- For instance: health, employment, food, shelter, and public safety

Who is suffering the most from these threats?

- Demographics show disproportionate vulnerability and suffering among the poor, communities of color, children and the elderly.

What solutions can be proposed to address immediate need?

What changes might be proposed to address the structural nature of the inequality inherent in the varying magnitudes of suffering among different communities?

In addition to making recommendations pertaining to emerging crises and the need for urgent public responses, CAPP would foster a network of advocacy in the Diocese of North Carolina by:

- identifying resources and local leaders, including Episcopalians who are already involved in some aspect of advocacy in their local worshiping communities and/or as part of secular nonprofits or other ministries;
- inviting individuals and churches to discern a call to advocacy ministries; and
- connecting with our partners in our neighboring dioceses, as well as with ecumenical partners and existing networks of advocacy.

APPENDIX 2:

Protection/Prevention/Equipment Practices

INTRODUCTION

The Protection/Prevention/Equipment/Practices (PPEP) subcommittee inspected safety issues affecting the “Venn diagram” of concerns operative in a staged reopening of church buildings for worship.

While our focus was the Phase I of North Carolina’s 3-phase plan for reopening the state, the evolving science we considered really applies to all phases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General

- SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes the pandemic disease termed COVID-19.
- PPE refers to “personal protective equipment;” PPEP refers to this “Protection/Prevention/ Equipment/Practices” task force subcommittee.
- PPEP recommendations apply to everyone and everything about the church.
- Vetted new information needs to be matched to changing pandemic circumstances.

Specific

PPEP recommendations concern:

- Preparing buildings and cleaning/disinfecting spaces
- Physical distancing
- Masks
- Hand sanitizers
- Screening
- Teaching/testing/tracking/treatment/confidentiality
- Future issues

Preparing to Reopen Buildings and Spaces

During Stage One: Coping with Crisis, buildings should be prepped to reopen for use.

Facilities closed for extended periods pose potential air and water quality risks. Therefore:

- Make sure HVAC systems are checked and in working order.
- Make sure water lines are flushed to remove stagnant water.
- Follow CDC recommendations to assure building water quality and avoid issues with Legionella or other bacteria.
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/wmp/toolkit/wmp-risk.html>

- Clean spaces properly, check HVAC and water systems, create signage and develop plans for logging entrances and exits, screening, physical distancing and after-use disinfection.
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>
- “Human coronaviruses can remain infectious on inanimate surfaces for up to 9 days. Surface disinfection with 0.1% sodium hypochlorite or 62e71% ethanol significantly reduces coronavirus infectivity on surfaces within 1 min exposure time. We expect a similar effect against the SARS-CoV-2.”
 - Reference: Kampf G, Todt D, Pfaender S, Steinmann E. Persistence of coronaviruses on inanimate surfaces and their inactivation with biocidal agents. Journal of Hospital Infection 104 (2020) 246e251
 - Available through ScienceDirect or PubMed
- Plan for cleaning and disinfecting your facility, including everyday steps, steps when someone is sick and considerations for employers.
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
- Consult guidance for cleaning and disinfecting public spaces, workplaces, businesses, schools and homes.
 - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/ReOpening_America_Cleaning_Disinfection_Decision_Tool.pdf
- Purchase Environmental Protection Agency “List N” disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2.
 - <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

PHYSICAL DISTANCING AND SPACE EVALUATION

During Stage One: Coping with Crisis, spaces should be assessed, mapped and marked for 6 feet of physical distancing between people.

- Consider all spaces: What does 6 feet look like in the sanctuary, offices, bathrooms, conference rooms, parish halls, etc?
 - A “personal circle” with a radius (r) of 6 feet covers an area of 113 sq. ft.
 - The area of a circle = πr^2 or $3.1417 \times 36 = 113$.
 - A space’s square footage divided by the size of a “personal circle” equals the number of people a space may ideally hold.
 - A space that is 200 ft x 50 ft = 10000 sq. ft, when divided by 113 sq. ft/ person, can hold 88 people maintaining 6 feet of separation at all times.
- Use a measuring tape, 6 feet lengths of string or rope, or rolls of painter’s tape for this purpose.
- Consider a household or family unit sitting together in a way that maintains distancing between them and other households.

MASK USE

During any stage of reopening masks are worn to protect others from any one of us—regardless of the activity engaged in—as we may be asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 virus carriers even in the absence of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

- CDC Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith recommends the use of a cloth face covering (mask) at all indoor gatherings by everyone except children less than two years old.
 - [CDC Draft guidelines for Faith Communities](#)
 - Surgical and n95 masks should be reserved for healthcare professionals.

Mask Guidelines:

- Masks are to be used along with strict 6 feet of physical distancing and frequent handwashing and/or hand sanitizer use.
- Cotton cloth masks made of two to three layers of breathable cotton are preferred.
 - Commercial versions are becoming available (e.g., C.M. Almy, companies that have buy one/give one deals, etc.).
 - (See do-it-yourself instructions below.)
 - Cotton quilting material or flannel are better filtering materials.
- When a scarf, bandana, buff or makeshift mask must be used instead of a mask, the guidance is that the thicker the material, the better, and that it must be at least two layers thick.
- Tie mask securely in place to cover your nose and mouth with no gaps between your face and the fabric.
 - If it does not stay/fit securely, do not use it.
- Masks must cover both the nose and mouth to be effective.
- Place mask on face prior to entering church buildings.
- Do not touch your face or the outside of your mask until you are out of the church or building.
- Remove mask by untying or slipping the elastic off ears without touching the mask outside.
- Wash cloth masks between every use.
- Dispose of paper masks after each use; do not reuse.

Other considerations:

- Be prepared to correct wearers if masks are fitted improperly.
- Persons unable or unwilling to wear a mask must not enter church buildings during this phase.
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene/mask behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer), tissues and no-touch trash cans.
- Consider posting signage about
 - [how to stop the spread](#) of COVID-19,
 - [everyday protective measures](#),
 - [properly wearing a face covering](#)
 - [washing hands](#) and covering coughs and sneezes.
- Consider inviting parishioners to make [homemade DIY masks](#) at home to be available at church for those who have none (or substandard ones) to take and KEEP (not to be returned or worn by another). These should be dropped off at the church at least 24 hours before they are distributed.

HAND SANITIZERS

Hands come in contact with places where virus can survive. (Times differ by type of [surface](#).)

It is a sound public health practice to disinfect your hands regularly. Hands are sanitized to protect ourselves and to protect others. Frequent handwashing is always encouraged.

The CDC recommends using anti-bacterial rub (ABHR) with

- greater than 60% ethanol
- or 70% isopropanol
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html>

Anyone entering and occupying any church building or facility should use approved hand sanitizer frequently.

For church facility purposes:

- Hand sanitizer can be dispensed in pump bottles or touchless dispensers (available on Amazon for under \$40).
- Hand sanitizer should be made available to each person entering the church facility.
 - Hand-sanitizing stations should be located at every entrance and exit point.
- Each person entering the church facility should apply a liberal amount of hand sanitizer to the front and back of hands using a brisk, lathering motion.
- Some parishes may also wish to provide bottles on individual pews or make them available within the church for use during the service.
- Hand sanitizer should also be made available in all other areas of the church and should be utilized upon entry and reapplied several times daily.
- The FDA and the PPEP do not recommend making your own hand sanitizer.
 - For more information, contact COVID-19-Hand-Sanitizers@fda.hhs.gov.
- Gloves are not recommended as they may play a role in transmission if used improperly.

SCREENING

Knowing who comes and goes and whether those persons have or have had signs and symptoms of COVID-19 is essential to minimizing the risk of pandemic spread.

The CDC Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith recommends screening and monitoring clergy, staff, congregants, and visitors using a church facility without exception

- [CDC Draft guidelines for Faith Communities](#)

Screening Considerations:

Once groups of any number are permitted to gather in public spaces, screening before entering church facilities and keeping records that show who is passing through church facilities are recommended.

Screening can help decrease potential COVID-19 exposure or spread in church facilities; records can help trace infected persons and their contacts when a COVID-19 illness develops.

Because COVID-19 can occur in persons with no symptoms, mild symptoms and severe illness, screening with specific questions can help identify people at risk for unrecognized infection. Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2-14 days after SARS-CoV-2 virus exposure. A negative test is no guarantee that a person is not infected, as false negative results vary with the brand and type of test used.

People with the following symptoms/symptom combinations present a risk of COVID-19:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Or two or more of these symptoms:³

- Fever
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

Children may have similar symptoms as adults but generally have milder illness and so they, too, should be screened with questions.

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html#Children>

Further, the CDC considers persons with a variety of characteristics and conditions to be at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness. (See below.)

Screening Guidelines:

The PPEP subcommittee recommends screening before entering any church facility.

Church communications about meetings and activities should make clear that persons answering YES to any of the following questions should NOT physically participate in an activity:

- In the past 30 days have you traveled internationally?
- In the past 30 days have you or anyone in your household had contact with persons with confirmed or suspected Coronavirus exposure or COVID-19?
- Do you have any of the following symptoms (even if attributed to another medical problem such as seasonal allergies): cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell?

³ This list is not all inclusive. New signs and symptoms are regularly emerging. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

Persons at high risk by CDC guidelines include those:

- Age 65 years and older
- Living in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- Any age with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:
 - chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - serious heart conditions
 - immunocompromised (Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications)
 - severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
 - diabetes
 - chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
 - liver disease

Monitoring Considerations:

Accidental exposures can (will) occur despite thorough care and screening.

The PPEP subcommittee recommends keeping a detailed log of persons entering and exiting church facilities. The log should include name, contact information, time in and out, and the log keeper's name. This information can assist in tracking exposures or contacts of an infected individual.

- Consider making a roster of participants before any scheduled meeting takes place.
- Decide who is responsible (e.g., usher, clergy staff or other designee) for verifying the roster.
- Consider how to maintain a running roster from all church functions.
- Make every effort to maintain documentation electronically for ease of reference.

TEACHING, TESTING, TRACKING, TREATMENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Teaching:

Churches should teach members—young and old—to follow established guidelines.

- Consider forming a medical advisory group to serve at the pleasure of the rector and/or vestry.
- Consider an online forum or education modules for member use.
- Consider what attention should be given to teaching children how to care for themselves and others (distancing, mask use, hand hygiene, symptoms reporting).
- Make use of available educational materials being created daily about COVID-19.

Testing, Tracking, Treatment:

These three areas overlap with medical domain responsibilities. The PPEP:

- Is NOT advocating temperature checking at entry points to buildings at this time
- Is recommending active screening (see screening section) of all persons joining groups—including outside groups—and keeping logs to assist tracing contacts of any infected individual.

Confidentiality:

- Knowledge of who has COVID-19 cases helps pastoral responses and insures the wellbeing of the community, communicate with health officials, make closure and mitigation decisions
- Outside groups using church buildings must accept that screening questions, logs, and records are necessary but may result in loss of anonymity if used to track an illness

FUTURE ISSUES

- Space use frequency
 - If a space is not used for seven to nine days or more, it needs only routine cleaning, not disinfection.
- Pew rack items
- Hymn singing and choirs
- Microphones
 - Shared microphone use should be discouraged, especially those that require serial users to adjust by touching.
 - All microphones should be cleaned according to manufacturer's instructions to avoid damage.
- Care of altar cloths, vestments, acolyte and choir garb, personal clothing
- Money handling
- Coffee Hour, meals, and receptions
- Altar Guild duties

Other Resources:

- Use the NCDHHS 2-1-1 phonenumber if you have questions about COVID-19 in NC
 - <https://www.ncdhhs.gov>
 - <https://www.nc211.org/coronavirus-covid-19>

CONCLUSION

PPEP subcommittee recommendations are subject to change as COVID-19 pandemic conditions change. In this iterative process; new information warrants new responses.