



The Diocese of Fond du Lac

The Episcopal Church in northeast and northcentral Wisconsin

TEMPORARY CHANGES IN BACK TO THE BUILDINGS

Effective September 29, 2020

The Bishop and Covid Task Force of the Diocese of Fond du Lac have considered the status of the pandemic in Wisconsin and the diocese. Based on significantly increased rates of infection and other factors, the diocese is temporarily suspending in-person worship and other gatherings except as noted below. These changes to the policy document take the place of the sections in the policy document, until further notice.

- ◆ *WORSHIP GATHERING SIZE*– no more than 4 persons, including worship leaders. This allows for a minimal community of the body of Christ gathered on behalf of the rest of body. Efforts should be made to select participants who are not essential workers, nor those in contact on a regular basis with a larger community. The number of Sunday services offered will be no more than the congregation offered before the pandemic. The offering of non-Sunday in-person services is temporarily suspended.
- ◆ *MEETINGS*– Vestry and other church groups (such as Bible study or prayer groups) may not meet in-person, but may gather virtually.

NOTE: As before, groups providing essential mental health, addiction or community support services (such as AA) may continue to meet in-person in church buildings provided they follow all safety guidelines including distancing, masks, sanitizing, etc.

- ◆ *KIND*– If offering the Eucharist, both bread and wine are to be consecrated. A small amount of bread may be reserved. Only the Celebrant (or a designated minister if the Celebrant cannot) will consume the wine. None of wine is to be reserved.
- ◆ *PARTICIPANTS*– Services for baptisms, weddings and funerals should be limited to no more than 10 persons, including all worship leaders. Participants must maintain six feet of social distancing and remain masked while on church property.

Other Considerations

Recognizing that the Holy Eucharist is “the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts” (BCP, p. 14) and with it offering “ourselves, our souls, and bodies” to God by the Church, even a small assembly is a spiritual good in itself. This small congregation serves as representatives of the whole congregation, not unlike delegates at convention.

It is essential that participation is strictly voluntary. No one, including our clergy, should feel, or be made to feel, obliged to participate. Integrating additional participants virtually through digital connections in some way is recommended.

BACK TO THE BUILDINGS

*Guidelines approved by the Bishop of Fond du Lac with the Covid-19 Task Force
Current as of September 29, 2020*

*It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.
Do not fear or be dismayed. – Deuteronomy 31:8*

*Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said
to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me. – John 14:5-6*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Following this introduction are directives for congregations in the Diocese of Fond du Lac to return to using their church buildings. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to change our familiar ways of doing and being God's Church. We suspended in-person public worship and had to abstain from Holy Eucharist. It has been hard and disorienting. While we were not gathering in-person, we did not cease to be the Church. Despite of constraints of the pandemic; we have found creative, faithful ways to worship and pray and connect with one another and to serve and to bear witness. Important lessons have been learned. Everyone, clergy and lay, is to be commended for your tremendous efforts to minister to each other in this time.

We are eager to return to our church buildings to worship God together. The diocesan Covid-19 Task Force of medical professionals, laypersons, and clergy from the diocese have met with me, regularly and virtually, to gather reliable data and recommend policies and procedures in response to the pandemic. The goal is having guidelines for our congregations which are medically safe, theologically sound, and pastorally attentive. Discerning how to balance those objectives has not always been straightforward, and your patience and cooperation have been appreciated.

We continue to look at what it takes for us to return more fully to our church buildings. Many businesses are opening completely with precautions in place, be we are going slower, partly from our desire to be careful, particularly for the sake of our more vulnerable members. It is also our understanding from public health experts that increased length of time in the same space increases risk. That makes worshipping in groups somewhat riskier than, say, a quick trip to the grocery store. We are setting our framework for returning to shared space independent of what businesses are doing or politicians are saying. We are confident our plan will enable us to worship as safely as possible.

As followers of Jesus, we base our decisions on how to resume in-person worship not on fear, but care — care for one another. The second greatest commandment, according to the summary of the Law, is to love our neighbor; and indeed, Jesus takes us further in giving us a new commandment: love one another in the same way he has loved us. It is love that needs to drive our policy-making — love for each other and for our neighbors, love that sacrifices our own desires and comfort in service to others.

Our return to in-person worship is in stages, moving from more restrictions to fewer as it becomes safe to do so based on public health factors. But the course of the virus is uneven from place to place and from time to time. If the number of cases increases, we may have to return to stricter protocols. It may feel like going backwards at times, so we prepare for that possibility.

Even as we return to our buildings, we have to go without many things we love about being church: singing, hugging, hand-shaking, fellowship at coffee hour, etc. — all of which are effective ways to spread the virus. We expect the wearing of masks and physical distancing, whose combination reduces the risk of spreading the virus. What we come back to will not be what we were used to — at least not for a while. However strange it may seem, though, it will still be meet and right to gather and worship, even if it is a worship that feels restricted in form and function.

We also need to remember not everybody will feel safe returning to in-person worship. Some will choose not to attend because of the constraints, and that is OK. Each one of us, laity and clergy, have to make prudent decisions to protect our own health and sense of safety. For some, this may be to continue sheltering in place, praying at home, and participating in worship online. Those who can gather for in-person worship will do so on behalf of—and in fellowship with—those who are unable or unwilling to do so.

The immediate future will continue to be strange and difficult. But gathering to lift our hearts up to God is what the Church does and so we adapt and grow. Hopefully, we will carry these lessons forward even when worship returns to that with which we were familiar. We are able to continue new ministries alongside our more familiar aspects of church life. We know from John, chapter 14, that Jesus is with us, and that he goes to prepare a way for us, even now. May the Holy Spirit grant us a sense of patience, forbearance, and hope as we seek to follow Jesus in the Way that leads to life everlasting.

The Rt. Rev. Matthew A. Gunter
Bishop of Fond du Lac
on behalf of the Covid-19 Task Force

INTRODUCTION

This Back to the Buildings document is to provide direction to congregations and ministries of the Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac as they continue to adjust to life under the Covid-19 pandemic. Rather than being strict orders, the Task Force provides specific guidelines with recommended best practices. This broader approach reflects that the pandemic's impact on life in Marinette or Minocqua may be different than in Menasha or Manitowoc.

There are places when the Task Force is more directive and presents protocols which are necessary and vital, reflected by the strength of language. For example, "Churches already offering services on-line should continue to do so for those who continue to worship at home" is more permissive than "All participants entering the church building are required to wear masks and use hand sanitizer while in the building" which is more directive.

For questions or clarifications please contact the Diocesan Office at (920) 830-8866 or diofdl@diofdl.org. Someone there may answer your question, provide clarification, or direct you to a member of the Task Force who may be able to provide information.

PUBLIC HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

In crafting these guidelines, the Covid-19 Task Force has relied upon the many guidelines issued by federal and state public health agencies and national and state church leaders of various denominations, as well as the medical knowledge and experience of its members. The following criteria and "benchmarks" have been considered in advising the Bishop on the safety measures to employ for the congregations of the diocese and timing of a reopening plan:

- 1) trends in the reports of Covid or flu like illnesses,
- 2) trends in positive Covid tests,
- 3) degree of prevalence of Covid among health care workers, and
- 4) level of hospital capacity.

These criteria are universally recognized as based upon sound medical practices and are used as measures of community safety.

There is no *medical* resolution to the Covid-19 pandemic in immediate sight. As communities in Wisconsin transition to more frequent and larger gatherings in public places, and as fewer venues maintain social distancing and other safety measures, we may see an increase in Covid-19 related illness.

This Task Force continues to monitor indicators and ongoing recommendations from federal and state public health agencies to guide us as we move forward toward gathering in-person on a more regular basis. Political considerations have not guided our deliberations, except to the extent we recognize our obligations to be no less restrictive than legal requirements in place.

In addition to the decision about *when* to reopen our church buildings, the Task Force develops policies and safe practices about *how* to do so. In this effort we are guided by the same medical criteria, bearing in mind that as Christians, our duty is to both practice and model care and concern for *the other*—how best to keep our neighbor safe—as we reenter in-person fellowship.

GUIDELINES FOR SAFE RETURN TO CHURCH BUILDINGS

Each rector, vicar, priest-in-charge, or wardens when there is no cleric, in consultation with the vestry, shall determine when it is appropriate to return to holding church services in-person under the following guidelines, taking into account the risk in the local community as well as demographics and risk factors of members of the congregation. Because the spread of the Covid-19 virus will vary over time and region, changing conditions may require practices to change at the congregation level for the foreseeable future. Any resumption of in-building services must follow these practices.

GENERAL PRACTICES

- ◆ *WORSHIP GATHERING SIZE*—no more than 25 persons (or 25% of space capacity, whichever is fewer), including worship leaders. Congregations may offer additional services at different times to accommodate additional worshipers, provided additional protocols are followed (i.e. cleaning).
- ◆ *DURING TIMES OF WORSHIP*—no other meetings or gatherings are to be held in the church building. Other meetings or gatherings may not happen within 30 minutes prior to or after a worship service.
- ◆ *DISTANCE*—Participants must maintain a minimum of 6 feet between people who are not living in the same household.
- ◆ *HOUSEHOLD*—No more than one household or family unit should share a pew.
- ◆ *ENTERING/MASKS/SANITIZER*—All participants entering a church building are required to wear a mask and use hand sanitizer to reduce the risk of transmission to others. Churches should attempt to supply disposable masks for those attending. At a minimum, a small supply of masks should be kept on hand for those who arrive lacking one. Attendees should be reminded to launder homemade masks. Persons with health conditions which may preclude the wearing of masks (or young children who may be unable to wear masks) or who are unable abide by social distancing requirements, should continue to worship from home.
- ◆ *CLERGY*—A member of the clergy shall wear a mask any time they work in a church building which involves contact with or presence of other persons. (*see Liturgics section below*)
- ◆ *COFFEE HOUR*—Coffee hour and other social gatherings are not to be held.

- ◆ **ON-LINE WORSHIP**– Churches already offering services on-line should continue to do so. Churches without the resources to offer services on-line are encouraged to share in on-line worship with congregations who offer it. Encourage high-risk individuals to attend worship virtually rather than in-person.
- ◆ **CLEANING**– Following each use of a church building, commonly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, railings, etc. shall be disinfected as soon as possible. The space used for worship should not be used again until disinfection of such surfaces has taken place.
- ◆ **SHARED ITEMS**– Care should be taken to reduce use of shared items, such as prayer books. Participants are to be encouraged to “adopt one” and take it home and bring for personal use each week. A church may use paper orders of service which are to be disposed of after a single use.
- ◆ **VENTILATION**– Improving ventilation by opening windows or doors to admit outside / fresh air (as opposed to running recycled air systems).
- ◆ **DOOR PROPPING**– Whenever possible, prop doors open to avoid repeated physical touching of handles. Disinfect handles and other door surfaces following services.
- ◆ **TRAFFIC FLOW**– When feasible, participant movement and traffic flow should be in one direction. Signs and verbal directions should be given to create one-way traffic flow.
- ◆ **RECORD KEEPING**– A photo of those attending, with date clearly visible, is to be taken for each worship service to document proximity to others and assist in identification should follow-up be needed.
- ◆ **OFFICE**– Church office functions are to be limited to essential operations. Any person in the office is to wear a mask. If more than one person uses the office, its surfaces (phone, computer equipment, and writing utensils), are to be regularly sanitized.
- ◆ **BUILDING USE**– Non-church building users/renters (music lessons, etc.) may resume use if they are able to observe gathering limits and distancing protocols and the church is able to accommodate disinfecting needs. These users are responsible for maintaining a record of those who attend any event and be prepared to share it with the church leadership or public health officials as needed.
- ◆ **MEETINGS**– Vestry and other church groups (such as Bible study or prayer groups, but not groups meeting just for social purposes) may meet in-person, limiting attendance to about 10 (or 25% of space capacity, whichever is fewer). Each person must wear a mask and social distancing must be observed. Virtual meetings are preferred.
- ◆ **ENCOURAGING SAFE PRACTICE**
 - High risk individuals, including the elderly or those with underlying chronic medical conditions, are encouraged to attend on-line services rather than in-person services.
 - Anyone feeling ill, experiencing any symptoms of illness, or has been exposed to someone with a confirmed case of Covid-19 is to refrain from attending in-person services.
- ◆ **SYMPTOMATIC**– Any person who attends an in-person church service or meeting is required to contact the church if they or any immediate family member becomes ill or experiences illness symptoms within 14 days of having attended an in-person church gathering. This announcement should be made at in-person gatherings.
- ◆ **OUTDOORS**– During seasonable weather, outside gatherings may be a safer alternative to building use. If such an event is being planned, all safety measures described in this policy including gathering size, mask use and social distancing guidelines, must be observed.
- ◆ **OFFERING/COUNTING**– Encourage contribution electronically or by check. Cash received should be placed in a locked storage area for at least four days before counting. Counters should wear masks when handling money.

- ◆ **WATER**— receptacles for Holy Water in church buildings should be empty.
- ◆ **TOUCHABLE SURFACES**— A church leader should perform a walk through the church building and physical plant, looking for and removing items or closing areas where the common touching of items could increase risk of disease transmission.

LITURGICAL PRACTICES

Note: these practices are applicable to both indoor and outdoor services.

- ◆ **MUSIC**— Viruses are most readily spread through droplets, so there should be no singing or use of wind instruments. Live, non-wind instrumental music or recordings are encouraged.
- ◆ **DISTANCE**— The Celebrant and liturgical ministers must maintain social distancing of at least six feet. The number of persons in the altar area is to be kept to a minimum.
- ◆ **MASK USE**— Every person, including the celebrant and preacher, shall wear a mask throughout the service. A mask may be temporarily removed only to receive Communion, after which it is to be replaced and hands sanitized. Preaching, readings and intercessions must be performed from locations which maximize safe distance from the congregation.
- ◆ **HAND-WASHING**— The Celebrant and liturgical ministers must wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before each service and use hand sanitizer at the altar - especially before handling Eucharistic vessels.
- ◆ **ELEMENTS**— Only commercially prepared and packaged communion wafers should be used for communion. Place wafers directly from packaging into a cleaned receptacle for consecration to avoid touching. During the service and through the consecration, hosts are to be covered by a strong cloth sufficient to protect from contamination during the consecration. Gluten free hosts should be separately protected and distributed.
- ◆ **KIND**— Both bread and wine are to be consecrated. Only the Celebrant (or a designated minister if the Celebrant cannot) will consume the wine. None of wine is to be reserved.
- ◆ **APPROACH**— Distribution of the Sacrament is to be done by the Celebrant from a single station. Those communing are to approach in a line maintaining social distancing, retrieve the host while still wearing the mask, and consume after moving away. Hand sanitizer stations must be placed so the communicant will use immediately before receiving and immediately after consuming. Care must be taken to ensure no cross-traffic as people approach and leave (i.e. one direction).
- ◆ **CONTACT**— No contact options should replace any physical touching. This includes passing the Peace, passing an offertory plate or other parts of the service which may involve physical contact.

LIFE RITUALS

(WEDDINGS, FUNERALS, BAPTISMS)

General and Liturgical Practices above are to be followed. This section highlights guidelines directly related to life rituals. Outdoor services are subject to the same practices as indoors.

- ◆ **PARTICIPANTS**— Services for baptisms, weddings and funerals should be limited to no more than 25 persons (or 25% of space capacity, whichever is fewer), including all worship leaders. Participants must maintain six feet of social distancing on church property.
- ◆ **FUNERALS**— Funerals may be held at funeral homes with a track record of offering safe practices to enable larger groups to attend.
- ◆ **PRACTICES**— All participants entering a church building are required to wear a mask and use hand sanitizer to reduce the risk of transmission to others. Churches should attempt to supply disposable masks for those attending. At a minimum, a small supply of masks should be kept on hand for those who arrive lacking one. Attendees should be reminded to launder homemade masks.

- ◆ *OUTDOOR*– Outdoor rituals are encouraged where feasible and appropriate. Safety measures described in this policy including gathering size, mask use and social distancing guidelines, must be observed.
- ◆ *GATHERING*– No social or fellowship time on church property shall be held after life ritual events.
- ◆ *MUSIC*– Viruses are most readily spread through droplets, so there should be no singing or use of wind instruments. Live, non-wind instrumental music or recordings are encouraged.
- ◆ *RECORD KEEPING*– A photo of those attending, with date clearly visible, is to be taken to document proximity to others and assist in identification should follow-up be needed.
- ◆ *ATTENDANCE*– Anyone feeling ill, experiencing any symptoms of illness, or has been exposed to someone with a confirmed case of Covid-19 is to refrain from attending.
- ◆ *SYMPTOMATIC*– An announcement should be made that any person attending is required to contact the church if they or any immediate family member becomes ill or experiences illness symptoms within 14 days of having attended.

PASTORAL VISITS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- ◆ *PASTORAL CONTACT*– Clergy and lay leaders are encouraged to speak with individual high risk parishioners to encourage continued shelter at home and be prepared to provide pastoral support for any grief caused by not being able to return in-person to services.
- ◆ *COMMUNITY GUIDELINES*– Clergy and lay leaders are to follow guidelines set by their local communities (e.g. hospitals, assisted living facilities, nursing homes) as to the possibility and protocol of visits with patients and residents.
- ◆ *HOME VISITS*– To reduce risk of infection, there should be no visits inside a person's home. Outside or driveway visits, phone visits, virtual visits or other feasible means of providing pastoral support without direct physical contact are encouraged.
- ◆ *MASKS*– A mask is to be worn by any cleric or lay person making a pastoral visit to reduce risk of transmission to others, whether inside or outside.

LOOKING AHEAD

The timeline for moving forward, as individual congregations and as a diocese, continues to be in phases of engaging in larger group gatherings. Movement depends on a variety of factors, many of which are beyond our control. Most notably, changing public health conditions in each of our communities as well the state of the virus and other safety measures must be considered. We hope to be able to increase the size of our in-person gatherings, return to beloved church-led community events, and to allow more of our familiar aspects of worship, such as congregant music or more personal communion distribution. These transitions will take time and will be conditional, based upon each worship community's circumstances as well as local and state public health developments.

We keep in our minds that as people of God, our primary concern is for love of God and of our neighbors, who need our care and witness as we move forward as communities. Our future actions will continue to work for the mission of the Church—inside our buildings, outside of our doors, through social media, and by virtual worship opportunities, to reach those who cannot make it through our doors. We embrace this future with faith, hope and excitement for what God holds for us.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE

A variety of resources to assist in this time of transition, including links to governmental and other sources of information, may be found at diofdl.org/covid-resources. Additional material of interest may also be found at diofdl.org/clergy. A Covid-19 resource page is available on virtually every municipality website. Please take the time to discover this for your county and/or city, village or town website.

TASK FORCE

The Bishop of the Diocese of Fond du Lac appointed a Task Force shortly after the state of emergency developed to assist in providing direction to the diocese and its congregations. The Covid-19 Task Force has met regularly. By tracking the recommendations from public health experts, monitoring the response from fellow communities of faith, and soliciting ideas and expertise from others in our diocese, it is able to provide the direction to the diocese. Members of the task force are:

- The Rev. Chris Arnold,
Rector, Trinity, Oshkosh, Chair
- The Rev. Monica Burkert-Brist
Vicar, Holy Trinity Church, Waupun, former
Assistant Attorney General, Wisconsin Dept of
Justice
- The Rev. Dcn. Nicci Beeck
Grace, Sheboygan, for 18 years, public health
educator for the Brown County Health
Department
- Dr. Pamela Glennon
St. John's, Wausau, Orthopedic Surgeon
- The Rev. Sue Kruger
St. John's, Wausau, Hospital Chaplain and
Educator
- Dr. Brad Lauderdale
St. Thomas, Menasha, Critical Care and
Pulmonary Medicine
- The Rev Amanda Sampey
St. James, Mosinee, Chaplain at Ascension
Hospital, Wausau & St. Michael's, Stevens
Point
- The Rev. Christopher Wilkerson
Rector, All Saints, Appleton