



EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE of FLORIDA

PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES FOR REGATHERING FOR IN-PERSON / ONSITE WORSHIP

The Diocese of Florida is blessed with 63 churches in a variety of settings who worship in a broad range of worship spaces. Our leaders are faithful, creative and resourceful, eager to provide meaningful worship in this next season of our lives together. To re-gather onsite will take every ounce of that creativity, a willingness to remain flexible, and a deep trust in our Lord. This pandemic will not last forever. However, until it is deemed no longer a threat, protocols and guidelines will be, at times, mandatory and, at other times, recommendations. With the goal of offering meaningful worship, protecting the sanctity of the sacrament and liturgy, and providing a safe environment for our people we offer these protocols and guidelines.

We have created a 3-level reopening procedure and will give approval on all moves between levels. This will be guided by state and local “phasing” criteria. *Congregational leadership should remain aware of state and local guidance and contact the Diocesan Office if local situations create the need for a more flexible response in your context.*

[Florida's Covid Recovery Resources](#)
[Florida Phase One Re-Opening FAQs](#)
[Guidelines - Opening Up America Again](#)

I. LEVEL ONE

Note: If a church cannot hold services with these guidelines, please contact the Diocesan Office.

- **Governmental Phase One Guidance** *For areas satisfying the gating criterion for 14 days
 - *The vulnerable continue to shelter*
 - *The non-vulnerable continue to isolate from vulnerable family members*
 - *Maintain physical distance (6 feet) in public*
 - *Where distancing is not practical, limit social interaction to groups of 10 or fewer*
 - *Masks and frequent handwashing/sanitizing recommended*
 - *Discourage social gathering*
 - *Make accommodations for the vulnerable*



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- *Large venue worship may resume under strict distancing protocols*
- *No non-essential travel*

- **Church Activities Under LEVEL ONE**
 - Have 10 person “watch parties” in homes. Invite unchurched neighbors “to church” with you online.
 - Small Groups begin to meet utilizing physical distance, BYO Masks, no food
 - Ministry groups of less than 10 may resume meeting on campus (the vulnerable join virtually or by phone), maintaining “strict distancing protocols.”

- **Facilities**
 - Clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces frequently during ‘business hours’ and at the end or beginning of the day (ex. doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restroom facilities).
 - Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectants readily available.
 - Place easily visible signs explaining hygiene best practices (use bilingual signs or signs for young children, as needed).
 - No meals, food, or drinks of any kind should be provided.
 - Remove water from Baptismal fonts and holy water stoops
 - Books and printed material should be removed from the worship space.
 - Provide ample trash receptacles for used wipes, etc.
 - Create a circular marked traffic flow through your facility to keep people from passing one another.
 - Use of the facilities by other groups shall not impede or disturb the worship of the church. Resuming the use of the facilities by outside groups is at the rector’s discretion and in accordance with state and local guidance in effect.

- **Communication**



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- Send all church protocols in digital and/or printed forms to church communication lists prior to your reopen date to let people know what new physical distancing and hygiene practices to expect at church.
- Post printed copies of church protocols in an easily viewable location, inside all open facilities.
- **Worship** (10 people or less per worship space)
 - **Spiritual Communion:** The Book of Common Prayer refers to Spiritual Communion in the form for Ministration to the Sick, directing the priest to assure a person unable to eat and drink the bread and wine “that all the benefits of Communion are received even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth” (*Book of Common Prayer, page 457*).
 - Keep the number of worship leaders to a bare minimum.
 - Minimize person to person contact (Morning Prayer, cantor or solo or no singing)
 - Services should be held outdoors, wherever possible, following strict social distancing rules.
 - No nursery.
 - Vulnerable members participate via online worship.
 - Encourage the use of digital service materials or have one-time use bulletins.
 - Keep at least six feet separation, approximately the width of two seats, between parties in any row, except two or more members of the same household can sit adjacent to one another, with six feet empty on either side of the group.
 - Masks or adequate face covering for all attendees.
 - No physical contact between attendees, including shaking hands, hugging, fist-bumping, high-fiving, etc. whether in the building or elsewhere on church premises.
 - Prop open doors inside of buildings and to the outside, so that attendees do not have to touch doorknob or handles or assign volunteers or staff to open and close doors for parishioners as they come in and out.
 - Collection plates should not be passed. Provide a container or plate in a place that allows people to give their offering without touching anything.
 - Encourage online giving.
- **Revisit the Plan Regularly.**



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II. LEVEL TWO (25% Capacity, 50 person maximum in worship)

- **Governmental Phase 2 Guidance** *No evidence of rebound, after satisfying the gating criterion a second time
 - *The vulnerable should continue to shelter*
 - *Non-vulnerable should continue to isolate from vulnerable family members*
 - *All should continue to maximize public distance*
 - *Where distancing is not practical, limit your interaction to groups of 50 or fewer*
 - *Precautionary measures should be observed (i.e. masks and frequent handwashing)*
 - *“Large venue” worship may operate under moderate distancing protocols*
- **Facilities**
 - Continue cleaning and disinfecting procedures as in Level One.
 - No meals, food, or drinks of any kind should be provided.
- **Worship**
 - Planning of weddings and funerals should be in consultation with the Diocesan Office.
 - Masks or adequate face covering still required.
 - Strongly encourage congregation’s at-risk population to participate in the service remotely.
 - No “receiving line” held after church; ask families and individuals to exit pew by pew and to maintain social distancing.
 - Please hold conversations outside and observe distancing guidelines.
- **Communion**
 - Communion will be distributed in one kind only until further notice.
 - Only use wafers (no homemade or store-bought bread).
 - Distribution of wafers should be “touch free.”



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- Clergy, Lay Eucharistic Ministers, and anyone assisting in the distribution of the sacraments must wash hands prior to the distribution of the elements.
- Communicants will receive the wafer while standing (no kneeling).
- **Outreach**
 - Outreach ministries that are meeting an immediate need can continue to operate, at the rector's discretion, as long as the protocols for health and safety are in place, including social distancing.
- **Revisit the Plan Regularly**

III. LEVEL THREE (50% seating capacity)

- **Governmental Phase 3 Guidance** *For areas with no evidence of rebound satisfying the gating criterion a third time
 - *Vulnerable can resume public interactions, but practice physical distancing*
 - *Vulnerable should minimize social settings where distancing is impractical or impossible*
 - *Precautions observed (masks and handwashing) wherever distancing is impractical*
 - *Low risk populations should consider minimizing time spent in crowded environments*
 - *Visits to Sr. Care and Hospitals can resume with hygiene restrictions*
 - *Large venue places of worship operate under limited physical distancing protocols*
- **Facilities**
 - Continue to maintain cleaning and disinfecting practices.
- **Worship**
 - In accordance with guidance from health professionals, proceed toward full worship and communion and re-introduce other aspects of parish life.



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- **Revisit the Plan Regularly.**

Additional Points of Consideration for Level 3

III. Level 3

1. Resume senior care and hospital visits
2. Vulnerable may return (please use masks)
3. Prayer ministers in services may resume
4. Distancing still in effect, masks not necessary for low-risk parishioners
5. Prayer books and hymnals returned to pews
6. Ushers still “active”
7. Chalice an option
8. Adult, Youth and Children’s programs resume
8. Choir begins practicing if spacing can be maintained
9. Clergy drop gloves, keep mask at distribution
10. Continue to encourage parishioners to wear masks wash hands and use sanitizer
11. Coffee returns, but poured by staff in masks and gloves

IV. Resumption of Normal in-Person Worship (when “gating criteria” satisfied a fourth time)

1. Evaluate all adjustments, decide what protocols become permanent and which are lifted
2. Sanitizer stays at entrances
3. Communion in both kinds
4. Gloves and masks come off clergy
5. Ushers return to normal operations
6. Altar rail use resumes
7. Circular “non-passing” flow discontinued
8. Choir may resume
9. VBS may resume



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Questions church leadership should consider while planning phased reopening of church worship services:

- Is our worship space large enough to accommodate social distancing if the “regular crowd” shows up? If not, do we have an alternative, “overflow” space to offer (parish hall, chairs 6 feet apart, etc.)?
- How many people can we accommodate safely in our worship space with proper social distancing? How will we communicate this adjusted capacity with attendees, and what will we do if that number is exceeded?
- For congregations with large numbers of people, small spaces, or both: could we create an attendance schedule where people can sign up to attend one or two Sunday services each month?
- Is outdoor worship possible in our community? Can this allow for more people to participate and lessen the work of sanitizing the space? What happens if the weather turns bad suddenly on a Sunday morning?
- Can we gather sufficient volunteers or staff to sanitize our space before, in between, and after services? Can our congregation sustain this cleaning team for the “long haul”? Are there adequate cleaning supplies available to us or are they still hard to get?
- How and when will we conduct training for ushers, servers, altar guild, etc. to ensure they understand and follow the guidelines, and can answer questions if asked?