Updated Recommendations and guidance for navigating the next chapter in our pandemic landscape

September 1 2020

Public health orders and directives from the Bishop continue in order to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This document updates and compiles those Covid-19 directives originally presented in March 2020 and that have been clarified or amended.

A Letter from Bishop John S. Smylie

Dear friends,

We are weary... from COVID, zoom-fatigue, and the burden of constant emotional, performance and financial expectations. "Digital fatigue" has grown for many as our desire to be physically together deepens. What was initially considered a temporary experience of online worship and ministry now feels more burdensome.

The one thing we know is that there is no going back to "church as normal." Given that the end of this pandemic is not in sight, we must continue to adapt our lives not only as individuals, but as the church. We find ourselves on a new missional frontier and our ability as a diocese to adapt, and grow into this new normal is critical. Like generations before us that have faced significant challenges, determination and resiliency are required. Of key importance in navigating these uncertain times is keeping our congregations engaged and involved, while keeping them safe.

I am aware that stress between leadership and congregants is occurring over matters like in person gathering or the use of face coverings. We are caught between weariness and hope, resignation and new possibility. I want to affirm the hard work of all of you, lay, clergy, staff, congregations and ministries during this time. You have risen to the occasion, adapted your practices and routines, and worked diligently to safeguard the health and wellbeing of our neighbors while still living out our calling as Christ’s Church. I am grateful for every one of you and for the amazing efforts you have made. I ask for your continued grace and patience as we all continue to navigate through these times.

We have been living in pandemic mode since the middle of March. By now we imagined that conditions would be improving or that our concerns would be more focused on a
possible second wave of coronavirus in the fall. Instead, we find ourselves realistically looking at being well into 2021 before we are able to return to full corporate worship with no limitations.

At the time of this writing, infection rates and the related death toll from COVID-19 continue to rise in our country and state. There is no clear end in sight as to when and how this pandemic will ease its grip on our lives. The idea of 14 days of successive decreases of cases in Wyoming seems a long way off. Situations elsewhere in the country show that even when cases subside for a time, new outbreaks can occur when preventative measures are relaxed.

It is clear that we cannot control what the virus will do. Wishing it away will not change our reality. We are learning the hard way that our only option for helping limit the spread of this virus is to adapt our behavior. Behaviors that help prevent the spread of COVID are familiar by now:

- Physical distancing
- Stay outdoors if possible
- Avoid large gatherings
- Use face coverings when in public spaces
- Regularly wash and sanitize hands and surfaces

I want to reemphasize that your health and safety is of utmost importance. I hope that you will be encouraged by the relaxation of some of the restrictions. I am cautiously optimistic that easing up on some things will allow for a more grace-filled and joyful worship experience. With that in mind, the following document is presented and affirmed as of 3 September 2020.

I also want to encourage you to seek out opportunities in these times to reimagine how church can look and feel. Sharing God’s word as we move forward will require adaptable, innovative leadership. Embrace this time of fresh expressions of faith in how we connect with each other in new and creative ways. The Holy Spirit is breathing new life into the church – believe it. Be bold, dream big!

Warmly,

The Rt. Rev. John S. Smylie

Bishop
GENERAL GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES
Updated 9/1/20

An approved Regathering Plan must be on file before a church is allowed to reopen for services, office use, ministries or outreach programs or any other church-sponsored activity. If a church reopening plan is more stringent than these guidelines in any way, the church may file an amended plan document.

- **Face Covering - Inside**
  - All attendees, age two and older, at any indoor church service, meeting or event, are required to wear masks throughout the service or activity. Clergy, worship leaders, preachers, and lectors shall wear masks unless the person is speaking from the lectern or pulpit where a face shield or plexi-glass barrier may be used instead, PROVIDED the speaker remains at least twelve (12) feet away from any other individual and replaces the shield with their mask when the address or reading is completed.

- **Face Covering - Outside**
  - There is very little evidence of outside community transmission of the virus. Therefore, subject to six-foot distancing requirements below, all attendees at any OUTDOOR church service, meeting or event, may remove masks while seated or standing in one place. If not in assigned seat, or if approached by any person at a distance of less than six feet, all persons must wear face coverings. Speakers, clergy, worship leaders, preachers and lectors shall wear masks or face shields while speaking.

- **Physical Distancing**
  - Maintain a six-foot distance between individual household groups at all times whether inside or outside and in all buildings and ministry contexts. The number of people confined to any one area at a time is limited by the size of the room and the configuration to allow six foot distancing in all directions at all times.
  - Close contact between members of different household groups should be restricted before, during, and after the gathering.
  - Keep an online worship option for those who are vulnerable or not ready to come to church in person.
  - Plan seating so that people sit six or more feet apart (household groups can sit together).
  - Plan for dismissing congregants in an orderly way that ensures social distancing.
  - Consider:
    - Multiple services with a few attendees
    - Having people sign up for those services in advance while allowing for a few new people to drop in
- Having a service dedicated to those who are more vulnerable with even more extensive guidelines followed or held exclusively online
- Creating and assigning fixed seating to maintain safe distances
- Holding services outside
- Continuing virtual worship

- **Safety Protocol**
  - Individuals participating in the meeting or service should be coached on maintaining proper hand hygiene, avoiding touching their face, eyes, nose and mouth, and covering coughs and sneezes.
  - Post proper signage of rules and regulations as stipulated in church reopening plan.
  - Remind people to maintain six-foot separation at all times.
  - Remind people not to touch other people – no hugs, handshakes or touching.
  - Leaders will model good handwashing protocols.
  - Hand sanitizer should be made available at the entrance of the building for people to use upon entry and exit from the building

- **Screening – Staff and Leaders**
  - Prior to entering any church office, worship service, outreach or ministry, all staff, leaders and volunteers must complete a screening document for COVID-19, including the taking of one’s temperature, or indication of exposure to a person with COVID-19 during the previous ten (10) days.
  - Staff/leaders/volunteers with symptoms of illness or known exposure to a person with COVID-19 infection within the previous ten (10) days shall not participate in the gathering or report to work or volunteer activity.
  - Daily staff/leader/volunteer logs of the screening activity should be kept and made available for inspection by the local health officer or diocesan office.

- **Screening – Congregation/Visitors**
  - A log of all congregants or attendees at a service, office, meeting or gathering shall be kept with the date, time, name and phone number of the individual attending.
  - If congregants know they have been in contact with someone who may have been exposed, or have traveled outside of the state, it is strongly recommended they not come to church for 10 days after they have returned.
  - Congregants and visitors are NOT required to complete a screening sheet unless someone is suspected of being ill. Then, temperature will be taken with a touchless thermometer and individual will be asked to complete the screening questionnaire. If necessary, individual will be politely asked to leave.
• **Vulnerable Adults**

  o Those in the vulnerable group (65 and older or with compromised immune systems), are encouraged to stay at home as much as possible and to wear masks when they are in public and maintain physical distancing. Each person in this category “need to be advocates for their own health.”

  o Clergy in the vulnerable class must have a conversation with their Bishop prior to returning to service in a leadership capacity. Lay leaders in the vulnerable class are requested to submit a document to their vestry stating that they desire to return to a leadership position and that they will be advocates for their own health. This document must be approved by the vestry and a copy of said document will be sent to the diocesan office to be placed in the congregation’s file.

  o Presiding clergy may utilize lay leaders, deacons, or acolytes (whether in the vulnerable population or not), to assist in the service provided appropriate physical distancing can be maintained.

• **Lay, clergy, visiting clergy guidelines**

  o Supply to congregations in another county
  Clergy or lay leaders residing in a different county than the church they serve or supply must communicate with the church’s diocesan staff clergy liaison and obtain permission from the Bishop before presiding at a service. This approval must be received at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled service in order to preside at a service. The decision will be based on the metrics of counties where they live, have visited and where they are asked to serve, as well as other factors.

  o Clergy or lay leaders who have been in a large crowd or confined area for any length of time where physical distancing and masking protocols were not followed are requested to not come to church for 10 days after returning to their homes.

• **Cleaning/Sanitizing Protocols**

  o The entire facility should be cleaned thoroughly, including all high touch areas before and after each gathering, according to CDC guidelines for cleaning found at: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html).

  o Consider removing all non-essential items from the rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.

  o All frequently touched surfaces must be cleaned frequently using CDC-approved cleaning and disinfection products. This includes doors, knobs, light switches, windows, counters, desks, chairs, pews, tables, etc.

  o Provide disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer at key locations throughout building

  o Regularly clean and disinfect touched surfaces between all services.
Church restrooms will be wiped with disinfectant wipes after every use and cleaned at the end of each day. Follow the general recommendations for routine cleaning.

- Post the Cleaning Protocol in appropriate locations.

**Food and Drink**

Fellowship is important to our spiritual life and coffee hours and potlucks have been missed. If a church wishes to reopen a kitchen or serving area, a plan must be submitted to the diocese that complies with Wyoming Department of Health Guidelines for food service to maintain a safe serving environment. All mask, physical distancing, safety and cleaning protocols that apply to church facilities in general are applicable for food service as well.

Each church shall have at least one staff or volunteer who undergoes training, such as “Serv/safe” [https://www.servsafe.com/ServSafe-Food-Handler](https://www.servsafe.com/ServSafe-Food-Handler) or similar food safety training before food or drink may be served at a church event or activity. That person is responsible for ensuring that all designated servers (coffee hour hosts/hostesses, potluck servers, etc.) are trained to ensure:

- All servers have current food handling training
- All servers are trained on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and face covering protocols. All servers must wear masks and gloves at all times.
- All food contact surfaces, dishes and utensils must be cleaned and sanitized before and after any food service activity.
- All servers understand and complete health screening protocols
- Physical distancing shall be maintained to the maximum extent possible in any kitchen or food preparation area
- Only one person should serve a particular food to attendees

Any church utilizing outside catering services is responsible for ensuring that said catering service complies with these requirements.

No self-serve food options are allowed (buffets, cookie trays, etc.) unless food is pre-packaged. Food and drinks shall be provided by trained server(s), wearing masks and gloves. Pre-packaged food, bottled water, canned beverages, may be provided and may be self-serve. Coffee cups may be refilled or reused as long as the coffee pot does not touch the cup.

Tables must be limited to six (6) people, unless the members of one household exceed that number. Tables must be positioned so that attendees at different tables are at least six (6) feet apart from each other on all sides. Masks must remain on while receiving food in line and may be removed while eating or drinking provided six-foot household physical distancing is maintained in seating area. Outdoor seating is encouraged.
• **Emergency plan protocol**

Should anyone become ill or a confirmed COVID-19 case reported by an attendee at a facility, the Bishop’s office shall be notified, the building will be immediately closed and the County Health Department will be called. The County Health Department will advise the facility on cleaning, notification and other recommended steps before said building can be reopened. Churches are encouraged to obtain a bid prior to authorizing services.

**Worship**

Congregations should continue to prioritize worship opportunities that are safe, accessible, invitational, meaningful, and sustainable.

- We can combat fear with knowledge
- Church can maintain worship and community life
- We are showing God’s compassion in community
- God is with us in the midst of all of this
- We are God’s hands and feet at work in the world
- Let us move forward with hope, confidence, grace, courage, compassion – and most of all, love!

Seek out opportunities in these times to reimagine how church can look and feel. Embrace this time of fresh expressions of faith in how we connect with each other in new and creative ways. The Holy Spirit is breathing new life into the church – believe it. Be bold, dream big, think outside the box!

**In-Person Worship Experiences**

Congregations with expected attendance that exceeds the allowable number based on capacity with physical distancing may choose to postpone opening until physical distancing requirements are relaxed. They also may choose to offer multiple services that meet the guidelines. Doors and windows are encouraged to remain open to allow for better air movement ventilation.

- **Outdoor** - There is very little evidence of outside community transmission of the virus. Any in-person worship experience should prioritize an outdoor venue if possible.
- **Physical distancing** - All individuals, inside or outside, when in public or worship space should maintain a six foot distance between individual household groups at all times.
- **Use of face coverings** – At all indoor services, events or meetings, all those present aged two and over will be required to wear face masks or facial coverings to reduce the risk of asymptomatic spread. Subject to six-foot distancing requirements in previous sections, attendees at any **OUTDOOR** church service, meeting or event, may remove masks while seated or standing in one place.
Worship leaders or preaches, and those presiding over a funeral or wedding service, may wear a face shield or stand behind a plexi-glass barrier while addressing the congregation as long as they remain stationary at a lectern or pulpit and as long as they are able to maintain a 12 foot distance from the group and others during the speaking time.

Any time a priest or celebrant is at the altar for communion, they shall wear a face mask.

- **Collection Plate** - Continue to offer the ability to give through contactless methods (e.g., online giving) instead of passing collection plates. Collection plate may be set at door for use by congregants upon entering or leaving the church.

- **Singing** - Singing by the congregation is prohibited since prolonged and loud vocalization can increase distribution of respiratory droplets. Soloists may sing if at least 12 feet away from anyone and if they stand facing away from the crowd during the performance.

- **Audio/video equipment** - Microphones or other audio/video equipment should be sanitized after each use. If possible, provide each speaker with a designated microphone.

- **Bulletins, prayer books and hymnals** – These should be passed out to individual attendees by leaders and not passed or shared by attendees. All books used at a service must remain untouched for at least 72 hours before being reused for another service. If it is not possible to quarantine all books and reading materials for 72 hours, these items must be removed from church pews. Bulletins shall be handled with clean hands during preparation and disbursement to congregants and shall not be reused.

- Congregants are encouraged to carry a personal Book of Common Prayer, purchase one for personal use OR check out a Book of Common Prayer from the church.

**Online and Alternate Worship Experiences**

Churches are encouraged to continue to offer online, digital worship and meetings if possible. Explore opportunities to start or reenergize a fresh expression in your context. Consider:

- **Equipment** – A cell phone on a tripod and a Zoom or Facebook account is all you really need. Cameras, sound equipment and software may enhance the experience if you have the budget and manpower. Do not let the technical production to get in the way of necessary pastoral care attention.
• Content – Adapt worship for this platform rather than recreating exactly what you would do for in-person worship. This is the time to creatively reach those who, for whatever reason, may not walk through the doors of your church.
• Presentation – Is it accessible and user-friendly? How are you reaching out to new people and welcoming visitors? Online services know no geographical boundaries – reach out across the miles to engage others.
• Variation – Do you repeat the same service every week or vary the way worshippers are engaged? (Videos, music, etc.) Approved, alternate service offerings are good experiments to try with your online audience.
• Participation – Keep your lay leadership engaged and make sure the service is participatory to the extent possible.
• Collaboration – Combine services with other congregations or with your fresh expressions – share your resources.
• Evaluation – Evaluate the worship experience and explore best practices.
• Fresh Expressions – Be creative, embrace your inner fresh expression and celebrate the reality that we are now a newly packaged missional community of Jesus Followers. Increased small group gatherings, increased missional gatherings, continued virtual worship and a return to service ministries with the addition of new community relationships is the new normal.
• Remember that the Church is not a building – it’s all of us building the Kingdom.

Sacraments

• Communion
  o There is an accepted protocol that allows for wine-infused wafers or homemade bread morsels to be distributed to congregants.
  o Before the service begins the wine-infused communion wafers/broken bread and wine will be placed on the altar. They may be covered with a linen cloth. A priest’s host will be placed on a separate paten.
  o Congregants will not drink wine; only the host will be distributed.
  o The patens and chalice will be wiped with a disinfectant wipe as they are placed on the altar.
  o Prior to the Eucharistic Prayer, the celebrant and Eucharist Minister/Deacon, if applicable, will wash their hands with soap and water in separate basins for at least 20 seconds or more in the sanctuary, before touching any of the vessels.
  o The priest consecrates the wine-infused wafers or bread at the Eucharist and congregants receive the elements in both kinds.
  o Congregants will be asked to use hand sanitizer prior to approaching the communion station.
  o The altar rail will not be used.
  o Congregants, wearing masks at all times, will approach the Priest/Deacon/Eucharist Minister one by one to receive the sacrament while maintaining six-foot of separation at all times.
The Priest/Deacon/Eucharistic Minister will place a consecrated host in each parishioner's hands, being careful not to touch a hand or body part.

- If touching accidentally occurs, the Priest/Deacon/Eucharistic Minister will return to the washing basin and wash again.
- Congregants will return to their seats before briefly removing their masks to consume the Body and Blood of Christ.
- The Presider will then consume the consecrated priest host and wine after all the congregants who desire to receive the sacrament have received Christ’s Body and returned to their seats.
- The Priest/Deacon/Eucharistic Minister will place any consecrated host on the credence table, to be removed and disposed of in an appropriate manner (not consumed), following the service.

To infuse wafers/bread with wine and allow for receiving of elements in both kinds

- Two or three altar guild members don masks and gloves.
- Spread out clean white towels on counters and place the wafers/bread in neat rows.
- Take a small piece of a priests’ host and dip it into a small dish containing Red Wine and make a wine “cross” on each wafer/bread morsel. Alternatively, use an eye dropper and place one drop of wine in center of wafer/bread. The dark red wine shows up nicely on the wafers/breads.
- Let the wine on the wafers/bread dry completely – at least an hour.
- When the wine is completely dry on the wafers/bread, put wafers in zip lock bags and seal them tightly until Sunday morning Eucharist.
- The wafers/bread are placed on a paten wearing gloves and masks.

**Baptism**

- Baptism is allowed as long as the priest does not touch the person to be baptized.
- If an infant--parent holds the child.
- The priest blesses the water.
- The priest, or a member of the person's family pours the water over the person's head while the priest says the words of Baptism (keeping physical distancing at all times).
- There will be no anointing with chrism.
- The priest may use the branches to asperge the congregation after the baptism.

**Anointing**

- Blessings that include touch, laying on of hands or anointing are not allowed.
- A priest may pray a blessing or anointing words as long as the individual is not physically touched.
**Pastoral Care**

- This is an important time for us to care for our people, but for everyone's well-being, clergy should use the utmost caution in deciding whether to make an in-person pastoral visit.
- Hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living facilities are still strictly monitored. Please check with the facility before visiting.
- You may not visit any Covid patient in person.
- Pastoral visits outside, with masks and social distancing in place, are allowed and in-person visits subject to the same restrictions as are in place for hospital and other facility visits.
- Telephone calls, Facetime chats, and other apps and online platforms are great ways to stay connected during this time.
- Eucharist can be provided to shut-ins or the sick, or to those who are not comfortable returning to church yet. Blessed wine-infused wafers may be delivered to the person to receive communion in a sealed plastic bag and the person may join on a Zoom Eucharist OR a properly distanced home or institution visit.

**Children’s Ministry, Sunday School, Nurseries**

Nursery, Sunday School and/or children’s ministry operations may reopen if proper protocols can be maintained. Consider having children remain with the rest of their household or utilize an outdoor space with proper physical distancing.

Congregations who wish to reopen Sunday School, Pre-schools or nurseries are encouraged to submit a reopening plan through their diocesan representative following Wyoming Department of Health guidelines for pre-schools.