

An Update from Bishop Love on the Reopening of Churches For Pentecost Sunday

Dear Friends in Christ,

It had been my hope and plan to have the **Diocese of Albany Guidelines for the Reopening of Churches** completed and out to everyone by this past Monday. Unfortunately, while close to being finished, they are not yet complete. Once completed, they will then need to go to the Standing Committee for their comments and approval.

I know several clergy and parishes have been making plans to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost this coming Sunday. Because Pentecost is only four days away and the Diocesan Guidelines are not yet complete, I am making a special dispensation for those parishes that are planning a Pentecost Service, provided the following condensed version of the guidelines are followed:

- 1) All inside services must abide by the NYS government mandated group size of 10 people or less per service. Multiple services are authorized, provided the worship space is cleaned properly between services.
- 2) All inside services must provide adequate space for safe social distancing of at least six feet between individuals or family groups.
- 3) Outside services to include lawn and parking lot services may be held. Larger groups than 10 are authorized, provided each individual or family group maintains safe social distancing of at least 6 feet or more from one another.
- 4) The congregation for both indoor and outdoor services must wear masks.
- 5) The clergy must wear masks when in close proximity to others, to include, the Procession, distribution of communion and recession. The celebrant is NOT required to wear a mask while at the altar, provided they are by themselves and the bread and wine are covered with a linen or pall. Nor are the clergy required to wear a mask while proclaiming the Gospel or preaching, provided they are at least 10 feet away from the nearest person. The Gospel should be proclaimed from the front of the church instead of the aisle as is customary in many parishes.
- 6) Hand sanitizer must be used by all people when they first arrive at Church and again right before going to receive communion, whether inside or outside. I recommend each parish have someone assigned to hold the container of hand sanitizer as each person has the cleaning agent poured in their hands. The person must use the hand sanitizer first before helping others. They must also wear a mask and stand at a distance from the person they are ministering to.

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- 7) Altar guild members and clergy must use hand sanitizer before setting the altar. Clergy must also clean their hands with hand sanitizer before distributing communion.
- 8) Communion will be received in only one kind (the host/bread). It will be placed in the hand of the recipient, not on their tongue. Care needs to be taken when placing the host in the person's hand in order not to physically touch them. I would ask that communion wafers be used, rather than other forms of bread. The celebrant will consume the consecrated wine on behalf of the people.
- 9) Communion will be received while standing, (not kneeling), preferably at the head of the center aisle, or it may be taken to people while in their pews or seats. It is important to maintain appropriate social distancing while people come to receive communion.
- 10) Blessings will be offered over the person while not physically touching the head of the person being blessed.
- 11) If there are any baptisms, the clergy must cleanse their hands before and after the baptism as well as wear a mask. The Baptismal water will be poured outside following the service. It will not be saved for the use as Holy Water.
- 12) The Peace will need to be shared by means other than personal physical contact. Handshakes and hugs are not allowed at this time.
- 13) Choirs are not allowed at this time, due to social distancing requirements. One or two people may lead the music, provided they are at least 10 feet away from anyone around them. Some congregations may opt not to allow singing during the coronavirus pandemic. The wearing of masks by the congregation should help reduce the potential of spreading droplets while singing.
- 14) Lectors may remove their masks while reading the lessons, provided they are at least 10 feet from anyone in front of them. If the church space doesn't allow for proper distancing, the lectors need to wear masks.
- 15) The collection plate should not be passed, but rather be placed in a location that parishioners may access to make their offering.
- 16) The bread and wine should be placed on the credence table by the altar guild prior to the start of the service, and not brought up at the time of the offertory.
- 17) Congested areas need to be avoided, especially as people are trying to enter or leave the Church, as well as the communion line and other times when people tend to bunch up. Again, social distancing is very important. Clergy may stand to the side following the service out of the flow of traffic if someone needs to speak to them.

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- 18) If possible (especially during the warmer weather), keep the windows and doors of the Church open to improve air circulation with fresh outside air.
- 19) To cut down on potential cross contamination, parishes may want to print out the service for everyone to have their own copy, or use overhead projections if they have the means of doing so, as an alternative to the use of Prayer Books and Hymnals. If Prayer Books and Hymnals are used, they will need to be sanitized in between use.
- 20) Holy water fonts must be emptied and removed.
- 21) If people are not feeling well, running a fever, coughing, etc., or have been in contact with someone know to have the coronavirus (even if not showing symptoms), they should not attend Church, until they are well, or have completed self-quarantine. This is for their sake and everyone else's.
- 22) There will be no coffee hours or other social gatherings at church during this time. Many parishes are hosting "virtual coffee hours" that are going well and have been well received as an alternative to in-person coffee hours. Worship together and then go home and visit one another online in the safety of your home.
- 23) Virtual online, recorded and live-stream services should be continued if possible, even after in-person services resume. Not everyone is able to return to church at this time and countless others who we have not effectively reached before, are now being ministered to in very powerful and life changing ways. Keep up the good work!

While there are many more things that can be added to this condensed list of guidelines, I offer this in the interim, until the official guidelines are finished. I ask that everyone cooperate with these guidelines in an effort to provide a safe environment for our parishioners and visitors to come and worship our Lord this Pentecost Sunday. Your cooperation is in fact an act of love for each member of your parish family.

May God bless you richly, as He sends His Holy Spirit mightily upon you this Pentecost Sunday – the birthday of the Church.

Faithfully Your Brother in Christ,

+Bill

Bishop of Albany

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