



**Guidelines to be Followed by All Churches in the Diocese of Albany
During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

Please note: These are minimum guidelines and local clergy are encouraged to apply stricter measures as they consider appropriate in order to safeguard and promote the health of their congregations and local communities.

1. Attitude is important. COVID-19 needs to be taken seriously, but we don't need to live in fear. To the degree possible, we need to be proactive, rather than reactive to the coronavirus. Plan ahead.
2. At all times when gathering for worship, or carrying out ministry within the Church during the pandemic, keep in mind how the coronavirus spreads and take appropriate precautions to guard against becoming infected or possibly infecting others.
3. Clear, respectful signs informing people of the expectation and requirement of wearing masks, social distancing, and the use of hand sanitizer (all outlined below), as well as other necessary instructions, need to be posted near all entrance doors of the Church and other prominent locations.
4. If people (to include the clergy) are not feeling well, running a fever, coughing, etc., or have been in contact with someone known 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 health.
5. The following sign or something similar will be posted by each entrance door to the Church or worship area:

ATTENTION: Dear Friends, If you answer YES to any of the following,
we ask that you NOT Attend Church today:

- Have a temperature of 100.4 or higher
- Lost your sense of taste or smell
- You or someone in your household has tested positive for COVID-19 or has come in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19

6. Masks are to be worn at all times by those in attendance, unless otherwise noted below.
7. All inside services must abide by the current government guidelines for size - 50% of posted capacity as of 3/19/21. Multiple services are authorized, provided the worship space is cleaned properly between services, or seating is alternated to avoid potential cross contamination between one service and the other. Please note that the current mandated group size may be changed by the government with little to no warning. We will need to adjust accordingly.

8. Appropriate cleaning and disinfecting agents (for the surface being cleaned) will be used. Common areas such as bathrooms as well as often touched items such as door knobs, light switches, handrails, etc...need to be cleaned on a regular basis. The NYS Dept. of Health or CDC websites can provide some guidance.
9. All inside services must provide adequate space for safe social distancing of at least six feet between individuals or family groups.
10. Outside services to include lawn and parking lot services may be held. Larger groups are authorized, provided each individual or family group maintains safe social distancing of at least 6 feet or more from one another. Parked cars must be six feet from one another if people are sitting in them with windows rolled down for the service.
11. The congregation for both indoor and outdoor services must wear masks. The Church will need to have a supply of disposable masks available for anyone who doesn't bring their own mask with them.
12. The clergy must wear masks when in close proximity to others, to include, the Processional, distribution of communion, and Recessional. Parishes may want to suspend the Processional and Recessional during this time to reduce the number of acolytes and others needed in the Altar Party, and thus cut down on congestion in the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the sanctuaries in many of our churches are not large enough to provide the necessary space needed for social distancing during the Coronavirus Pandemic.
13. 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.
14. Hand sanitizer must be used by all people when they first arrive at Church and again right before going to receive communion, for indoor services. For outdoor services (where parishioners bring their own chairs), hand sanitizer is only needed just prior to receiving communion. We recommend each parish have someone assigned to hold the container of hand sanitizer as each person has the cleaning agent poured in their hands. This person must use the hand sanitizer first before helping others. They must also wear a mask and stand an arm lengths distance from the person they are ministering to.
15. Altar guild members and clergy must thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer before setting the altar. Clergy must also clean their hands with hand sanitizer before distributing communion.
16. 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. We 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. Individual communion cups with wine for the congregation are NOT authorized.

17. 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. Communion may be distributed to people sitting in their vehicles during parking lot services. Clergy should not bend over into the vehicle to distribute communion, but rather individuals should place their hands outside the car window to receive.
18. For those requesting a blessing rather than communion, blessings will be offered over the person while not physically touching the head of the person being blessed.
19. If there are any baptisms, the clergy must cleanse their hands with hand sanitizer 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 use as Holy Water.
20. The Peace will need to be shared by means other than personal physical contact. Handshakes and hugs are not allowed at this time.
21. 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 respiratory droplets while singing.
22. 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.
23. The collection plate should not be passed, but rather be placed in a location that parishioners may access to make their offering.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. If possible (especially during the warmer weather) keep the windows and doors of the Church open to improve air circulation with fresh outside air.
27. 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 if they are to be used again within three days (the potential life expectancy of the virus on objects).

28. Holy water fonts must be emptied and removed.
29. There will be no coffee hours or other social gatherings at church during the time of the pandemic. 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 at Church and then go home and visit one another online in the safety of your home, having a cup of coffee or tea and a dessert.
30. In-person Sunday School and Youth Group meetings are suspended until the fall, at which time a determination will be made based on the status of COVID-19.
31. All outside groups using Church property must practice social distancing, wear masks, use hand sanitizer when they arrive, and follow any other guidelines required by the parish during the Coronavirus Pandemic.
32. Unless social distancing requirements can be met, Vestry meetings and other church committees or groups need to be conducted via Zoom or by some other online means.
33. 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.