



ABOUNDING IN HOPE

THE DIOCESE OF IOWA PLAN FOR
REGATHERING FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP



Photo: Stephan Walker, taken 20 miles outside Iowa City

Updated 8.25.20 Changes are highlighted

FROM THE BISHOP

Dear Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. I greet you this way with words that should be in quotation marks. For, they are Paul's words in Romans 15:13 which he wrote from his mission base in Corinth to a new community of Jesus followers that had formed in Rome. He had never met them, but hoped one day to do so. He didn't know when that would be and, in the end, it was as a prisoner of the Roman Empire he found his way there. He would declare that God answered his prayer even through those circumstances.

Joy, peace and hope remain hallmark characteristics of people of faith. For our God is the God of Hope. How has there been opportunity during these past two months of "stay at home" experience to understand your faith as characterized by these qualities? Commenting on this verse in Romans, William Barclay tells a story of Winston Churchill in the war bunker just after the withdrawal of British troops from France in 1940. "Mr. Churchill outlined the situation in its starkest colors, Britain stood alone. There was a silence when he had finished speaking, and on some faces was written despair, and some would have given up the struggle. Mr. Churchill looked around that dispirited company. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I find it rather inspiring.'" In those days, as in these, we can respond to dark times with despair or with hopefulness. The hope, joy, and peace that Paul speaks of never denies the reality of sorrow, grief, or struggle in difficult times.

We know now that the coronavirus pandemic is not going away in a "singular, spectacular moment." Further, the state has begun re-opening to social and commercial activity in phases, and in adapted circumstances aimed at continuing to preserve one another's safety, while respecting the virus. It is time for us as Church to do the same. I am introducing to you how we intend to do this. A Diocesan Task Force, an informed, compassionate, faithful and cautious team have devised a phased in approach to re-gathering which takes into consideration the potential ebbs and flows of the virus, and asks of us a strong capacity of adaptation. I am very grateful for their swift and comprehensive work.

For yet a little while further, we will experience unusual sights in worship—congregations and clergy in masks, and the latter possibly in face shields. Almost like a throw-back to the days of "rented pews" we will be intentional in our seating arrangements, and in how we receive communion. At first, there will be things we will miss like physical expressions of our common love in Christ, filling our churches with congregational singing, and our ability to hang around socially. There will be demands of taking special care for the cleaning of the sanctuary and our church facilities. And we may not all be able to re-gather at the same time, as some of our elderly or most vulnerable members will need to remain at home until this pandemic is met with a vaccine or subsidies, so how will we continue to include them in worship in other ways?

The God of hope offers joy, peace and hope as we continue to put our trust in the Spirit. It is the same Spirit that led us into the creative, generous, faithful experiences of these past three months; and it is the same God of hope who walks with us as we face the suffering of the pandemic's disruption, and especially amidst the deep sorrow of over 320,000 deaths world-wide, more than one quarter of whom come from among the United States.

My hope is that we see the connectedness of this world with eyes made sharp by the reality of the pain, and by the courage and compassion people have shown everywhere. We want some experience of normality again, and that is only natural. Yet a world stopped, and in that silence God's whisper could be heard: "See, I am making all things new." (Rev 21:5) Abundant in hope, this plan offers a few steps toward exploring that way forward.

In the peace and love of Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Alan Scarfe, Bishop of Iowa

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)

In the Diocese of Iowa, as we continue to wrestle with the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic, we know that God is with us. The faithfulness and creativity of The Episcopal Church's response across the state has given witness to the love and care we have for one another and for our God. Phone calls, care packages, grocery shopping, food drives, mask-making, providing online services of prayer/study/worship, and advocacy on behalf of our neighbors who are being made to work without adequate protective equipment—all of these things and more have been experiences that will likely also shape our future as a church as we move forward, abounding in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we plan together for the next stages, we will continue to seek out up-to-date guidance from public health officials¹, guidelines from state² and national officials³, as well as advice from other medical professionals⁴ and faith leaders. In the early days of this pandemic, many of us had voiced the joy-filled dream of us all gathered together in celebration around our altars. Now we are realizing that the return to our churches will need to happen in phases.

This document sets out a framework for those phases to help guide clergy and lay leaders in making their own plans for returning to in-person worship in coordination with the bishop's office. We recognize that all ministry is contextual and that the demographics of our congregations and physical spaces are different all over the state. There will also be different levels of virus activity in each of our communities. You will have to adapt these guidelines to the particular needs of your congregation, what is possible in your physical space, what is possible given the demographics of your people, and trends of the virus locally. Be aware that a flare-up of virus activity in your area may mean a return to a previous phase.

May we enter into each of these next phases of our common life together with mutual discernment, knowing that the God of hope will sustain us through this time as we carry out God's mission of sharing the Good News of the Risen Christ and recommit to making the care of our neighbors and the most vulnerable among us one of our highest priorities.

Section One: *Questions for clergy and leadership to consider*

Section Two: *A Phased Regathering*

Section Three: *Encouraging safe practices*

Section Four: *Additional resources*

1 "Community and Faith-Based Organizations: Plan, Prepare, and Respond," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>.

2 <https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/61/covid19/Guidance%20-%20Religious%20Facilities%20and%20Places%20of%20Worship.pdf>

3 "Guidelines: Opening Up America Again," <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>.

4 "Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors" https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf



QUESTIONS FOR CLERGY AND LEADERSHIP TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP

As you are beginning to think about regathering in person for worship:

- How will you balance the need for worship with the needs for community and public health?
- How will you continue to provide worship opportunities and connection for members who are high-risk or not comfortable gathering during this time?
- How feasible is it for your congregation to maintain both online and in-person worship and connection?
- Is your clergy able and ready to return to in-person worship?
- How will you propose when it is time to gather for worship again and to move to the next phase?
- How do you respond to someone who is pushing to return to in-person worship before our diocesan guidelines deem it safe to do so? How do you respond to someone who blames you for taking their “right” away to worship as other businesses open? How do you respond to someone who insists this is a hoax?
- What are the health characteristics in the communities where you and your members gather, live, and work?

When you are ready to regather in person, and the health characteristics in your county and the counties where your members live and work are improving:

- How many people do you expect to worship in person? How will you limit attendance to the required maximums?⁵
- Is your worship space big enough to allow for sufficient distance between households? What is the seating capacity of the space you will use for worship? How might you be creative with worship? Have you considered worshipping outdoors, in cars or other ways?
- How will you communicate expectations about who should and should not attend worship in person and new practices (both individual and as a church body) while worshipping together in person?

⁵ Ways to limit attendance: use a free service like [ReOpen.Church](#) or [SignUpGenius](#) to have families/ individuals let you know which service they plan to attend (leaving space for newcomers to attend), encourage people to attend every other or every few weeks, add more services, etc.



- How will you welcome newcomers?
- How will you ensure safe physical distancing as people enter and exit the worship space? In other areas of the building? In restrooms?
- How will you limit the opportunity for the virus to spread during worship through the air and commonly touched surfaces? How will you avoid or mitigate the impact of interactions with less than 6 feet distance in common liturgical practices like the Peace, Gospel Proclamation, Offertory, Communion? How will you demonstrate connection without handshakes & hugs?
- How will you ensure disinfection of your physical space after/between services?
 - Worship bulletin disposal, prayer books, etc.
 - Areas where small groups gather during the week, if unable to meet online
 - Pews or chairs
 - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in your building
- How will you update your building use agreement for outside groups to reflect the realities of the coronavirus pandemic?
- How often will you review your safety protocols?

As you begin to regather in person:

- How will you handle grief related to the changes in worship during this time?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual while still maintaining privacy and pastoral care? (see sample communication plan available at iowaepiscopal.org/abounding-in-hope)
- How will you pastorally deal with people acting out or ignoring protocol?
- How will you prepare your congregation in the event that the health characteristics in your area worsen and the congregation needs to temporarily return to more assertive forms of distancing?

PHASE ONE: STAYING AT HOME OR OUTSIDE

Health Characteristics to be taken into account in the county where the church is located (AND in the counties where the church members & church staff work and live) include:

- Doubling time⁶ of new cases is less than twenty days;
- COVID-19 death rates⁷ are increasing on average over the last 14 days and/or the test positivity rate is over 10%.

Guidelines:

- Worship is held online or outdoors with a maximum of 25 people only. All guidelines for indoor worship in Phase 2 apply to outdoor worship. Masks or shields must be worn by all. Hand sanitizer should be provided for worshipers and liturgical participants. A tent with sides should be treated as an indoor space. Congregational singing is discouraged.
- Church staff have limited presence in the building, only as essential and that can be done safely. Staff should wear masks when working together indoors, and if there is more than one person in the office, all surfaces should be regularly cleaned and sanitized.
- Outreach ministries are limited to those which can be done with proper safety equipment and 6' physical distancing.
- Weddings, funerals, and baptisms are to be kept to under 10 in attendance, and you are encouraged to offer opportunities for others to participate online. For infant baptisms, only the family should hold the child, not the celebrant.
- Bible studies, church committees, and small groups meet online only.
- Christian formation and youth activities may happen outdoors, with a limit of 10 people for any gathering, maintaining 6' physical distancing, with all wearing masks or shields.
- In-person pastoral visits may only happen outdoors, all wearing face masks or shields.
- Masks are worn in any situation where you are gathering with people from outside your household and physical distancing of 6' is maintained.

⁶ To view the current doubling time for a county visit iowaepiscopal.org/abounding-in-hope (data drawn from IDPH) If you would like assistance understanding the trends in your area email diocese@iowaepiscopal.org

⁷ To view the COVID-19 death rate in a county, visit iowaepiscopal.org/abounding-in-hope (data drawn from IDPH) If you would like assistance understanding the trends in your area email diocese@iowaepiscopal.org



PHASE TWO: GATHERING WITH CARE

Health Characteristics to be taken into account in the county where the church is located (AND in the counties where the church members & church staff work and live) include:

- Doubling time of new cases is over twenty days;
- Death rates are stable or declining on average over the last 14 days;
- Test positivity rate is under 10%;
- Testing and contact tracing is available in your area.⁸

Guidelines

Churches are encouraged to continue to offer (or point people to) online services by your church or the diocese for those that do not feel comfortable returning to in-person worship. Older people or people with health conditions should take special care in deciding to return to worship or events. **Churches who do not want to begin gathering for in-person worship at this phase have the full support of the bishop.**

- **Churches who have deemed it safe to regather, should submit their plan for regathering for in-person worship in consultation with the bishop, and may reopen when the bishop has approved the plan, with the advice of the Task Force on Regathering, and has verified that the health characteristics of the area allow for regathering.**

Safety practices

- **Churches may begin to hold in-person worship at 25% of the seating capacity (max) of the worship space.** You are encouraged to worship outdoors if space and weather allow.
- Anyone who is feeling unwell, or anyone who is a member of household where someone in the household feels unwell, should stay home.
- All present (over the age of two) shall wear masks⁹ (or protective face shields¹⁰ as those become more readily available) at all times while in the building, either brought from their homes and/or provided by the church and placed near the door (in a way that people can touch one without touching others). Exceptions should be allowed for people with sensory or neurological disorders.
- All clergy shall wear a mask and/or clear protective face shield, supplied by the congregation if necessary.
- In order to provide for 6' spacing between households, consider identifying and visually marking pews that people can use that are appropriately spaced.
- Any handouts or welcome materials should be on a table and easy for people to pick up

⁸ To find out if testing and contact tracing is available in the county, contact your local public health department. For a contact list of local public health departments visit: <https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory?searchType=stand&lhd-state=IA#card-filter>

⁹ "Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community- Based Transmission," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

¹⁰ Face Shields and Containment of COVID-19 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2765525>

PHASE TWO: GATHERING WITH CARE, continued

without touching others. A greeter can staff the table, as long as they can maintain 6' physical distance.

- Maintain a good stock of tissues and hand sanitizer. If your restroom will be open for people to use, consider adding sanitizing wipes for the bathrooms that people can use to wipe down surfaces after use.
- Church offices may open if there are ways to do that and maintain 6' physical distancing.

Building and signage

- Prop open the door(s) people will use to enter and exit the building, so people do not have to touch the handle. If possible, designate separate entry and exit doors that can be propped open.
- Post signs that list the symptoms of COVID-19 and that urge people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Do not seat anyone near an HVAC blower in the sanctuary. Do NOT use fans in the sanctuary. Again, can you consider outside worship?

Liturgical practices

- NO congregational singing is allowed indoors. According to the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) and the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) and others, there is NO spacing solution for singing groups that would eliminate the risk.¹¹ Masks do not provide safe methods of singing. Instrumental (non-wind instruments) or recorded music is allowed. Congregations can consider using a soloist or cantor, if they can be more than 20' from any other participant or a barrier can be put between them and any other person. Examples of effective barriers include plexiglass or clear plastic sheeting. The congregation can be encouraged to recite the hymn, hum softly along, etc.
- Use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. The Peace should be passed verbally with nod/bow/other, with each staying in their own pew. Remove all non-essential items like pens/cards, etc. from the pews. Consider removing prayer books and Bibles if you will have multiple services. Use bulletins pre-placed in the pews a day or two before the service (do not reuse), space out bulletins on a self-service table, or use screens as alternatives. Consider having an offering basket placed near the entrance where people can drop their offering as they enter. Continue to encourage online giving.
- Avoid greeting "receiving lines" at the door before and after worship.
- Pay attention to physical distancing guidelines for processions. Processions should be single file, if used.
- Weddings, funerals, and baptisms attendance is limited to 25% of capacity in the worship space, with 6' physical distancing in place.

Eucharist

- If you choose to celebrate Eucharist instead of Morning Prayer: The table will be set without acolyte assistance. Priests should find a way to wash their hands with soap and water before setting the table or beginning the Eucharistic Prayer. A Deacon may prepare the table if they are masked and wash their hands with soap and water properly before and can stay 6' away from the priest.
- We recommend that all communicants receive while standing and remain 6' apart from each other in line or at the altar rail. Bread should be the only element offered to the people, and can be "dropped" into the hands of a masked communicant, who should wait till you have moved (or they

¹¹ <https://www.middleclassartist.com/post/nats-panel-of-experts-lays-out-sobering-future-for-singers-no-vaccine-no-safe-public-singing?fbclid=IwAR3-2Q0mqQDFLNul8p1-3cdqRLggs6Srg4SZDIMyiMCvVpd5NXB3SJxwco>

PHASE TWO: GATHERING WITH CARE, continued

have) to take their mask down temporarily to consume, sanitizing their hands back in their pew after they have touched their face. If at any time during the distribution the priest's hands come in contact with someone else's hands, the priest must re-wash (or resanitize) their hands before continuing the distribution.

Outdoor worship

- All guidelines for indoor worship apply to outdoor worship, with the following exceptions: Capacity may expand beyond 25%, given ample area to maintain 6' distances. Hand sanitizer should be provided for worshipers and liturgical participants. A tent with sides should be treated as an indoor space. Congregational singing is discouraged outside, especially in larger groups. The Task Force was advised that singing outdoors would require much more than 6' distancing, all to wear masks, and for all to be aware of and responsive to how the wind was moving.

Cleaning and sanitizing

- Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.¹²
- If there is only one service, consider waiting to clean the church for 72 hours after the service to prevent infection for the cleaning crew. Current evidence suggests that coronavirus remains viable for several hours to days on surfaces.
- Special attention should be given to how you will limit bathroom traffic and provide for regular cleaning and sanitizing (see additional resources).

Use of the building other than for worship

- No coffee hour or social gatherings.
- There should be no indoor in-person Christian Formation, Vacation Bible School, or nursery care offered during worship. Youth should be seated with their households for worship. Families with young children or anyone who may have a hard time practicing social distancing or wearing masks may want to continue online worship.
- Bible Studies, small groups, vestries, and committees should continue to meet online only. If necessary, vestries may meet in person, in a space large enough to allow for 6' physical distancing.
- Christian formation and youth activities may happen outdoors, with distancing and food is allowed at outdoor gatherings if individuals/households bring their own for their own consumption. All shall wear masks.
- Outside groups that use your building may resume meeting there, as long as they are able to maintain physical distance and clean and sanitize surfaces that they touch.

Contact tracing in case of exposure

- Have a process for recording the names of attendees in case there is a need to do contact tracing. Ushers/greeters should make sure these records are accurate and complete. Make sure outside groups using your building have a person to contact in your leadership to report a potential exposure.
- If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user has tested positive for COVID-19, contact the bishop, cooperate fully with contact tracers, and put your communication plan¹³ in place, giving all necessary information while maintaining confidentiality.

If there is a rise in positive cases in your area, let the bishop's office know and you may need to return to a previous phase's protocols. If a worshiping member tests positive for COVID-19, all worshipping members who were present with them in the previous two weeks will need to be notified of their potential need for testing and self-quarantine, and the church will go back to Phase One.

¹² "Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>.

¹³ See sample communication plan: <https://www.iowaepiscopal.org/abounding-in-hope>

PHASE THREE: EXPANDING OUR GATHERINGS

Health Characteristics to be taken into account in the county where the church is located (AND in the counties where the church members & church staff work and live) include:

- Doubling time of new cases is more than 40 days;
- COVID-19 death rate is decreasing on average or is zero over the last 14 days;
- Test positivity rate is under 3%;
- Testing and contact tracing is available in your area.

Guidelines: *Churches who believe they are ready to move to Phase Three should submit their plan to the bishop for approval.*

- Churches are encouraged to continue to offer (or point people to) online services by your church or the diocese for those that do not feel comfortable returning to in-person worship. **Churches who do not want to begin gathering for in-person worship at this phase have the full support of the bishop.**
- **Churches may begin to worship (following all the guidelines listed in Phase Two), at 50% of the seating capacity (max) of the worship space IF they can find ways to limit the amount of people to what the physical space will allow for in order to maintain 6' physical distance between households.** That may include any or all of the following: adding more services, encouraging people to let you know beforehand which service they plan to attend using an online sign-up (and allowing space for any visitors who may show up), paying special attention to areas of the church that people have to pass through so they can do that safely.
- Older people or people with health conditions should take special care in deciding to return to worship or events. Safety for worshipers and their families is paramount, and no one should feel pressure to return to church until they feel ready.
- Maintain increased sanitation/cleaning and hygiene measures at church.
- In-person indoor pastoral visits can resume to low-risk parishioners, by low-risk staff or volunteers.
- Continue to offer Bible Study and Christian formation online as you are able; small groups of 10 or fewer people may meet in person for formation if they meet in a room of sufficient size to maintain six feet of distance between them.
- Youth groups may resume indoors if they can maintain physical distancing. Sunday Schools and youth gatherings limited to 10 children or 15 youth and must follow above guidelines as applicable – larger groups may need to divide and/or meet outdoors (maybe shuffle so children/youth get to build relationships with each other).
- Social gatherings are allowed, without food and drink, if they can be held following 6' physical distancing guidelines. Outdoor gatherings are preferred if possible. Food is allowed at outdoor gatherings if individuals/households bring their own for their own consumption. If food is catered, it should be plated and served by servers wearing masks and gloves.

If there is a rise in positive cases in your area, let the bishop's office know and you may need to return to a previous phase's protocols. If a worshipping member tests positive for COVID-19, all worshipping members who were present with them in the previous two weeks will need to be notified of their potential need for testing and self-quarantine, and the church will go back to Phase One.

PHASE FOUR: GATHERING WITH ALL IN JOY

Health Characteristics to be taken into account in the county where the church is located (AND in the counties where the church members & church staff work and live) include:

- Effective treatment and/or effective vaccine is readily available in your area;
- Physical distancing recommendations are lifted completely by the CDC;
- No new cases have been reported in your area for over 14 days.

Recommendations:

- Worship may resume without the guidelines listed in previous phases.
- All other church activities may resume.
- Continuing to offer a virtual way for people to meet and worship is encouraged, as your resources allow.

Section Three: Encouraging safe practices

- Communicate clearly, often, and in different ways about the current protocols you have in place.
- Use clear signage that describes church policies and best hygiene practices.
- Consider what visual cues you can put in place to help people remember to keep proper distancing. Tape on the floor? Visually marking pews where people can sit? Marking clear routes of movement?
- Each Sunday, have a greeter/usher well-prepared to give guidance to people as they enter, and station them a safe distance from people as they enter the building. During Phases Two and Three, ushers will not be needed to pass the offertory or help people as they go up for communion, but they may well be needed to help give gentle guidance to those who may not know or remember to refrain from standing too close or shaking hands, etc.
- Ask your vestry to help communicate the community expectations that are in place to protect all of us, especially the most vulnerable among us and in our communities.

Section Four: Additional Resources

Visit iowaepiscopal.org/abounding-in-hope for more resources, including:

- A sample communication plan in the event someone in your congregation tests positive for COVID-19
- Additional cleaning protocol suggestions
- Considerations for the use and sanitation of restrooms during the coronavirus pandemic
- Ways to limit attendance at services
- Sources for masks and shields
- Guidance for Episcopal day care centers and preschools



The Episcopal Diocese of Iowa

Recommendations from the Bishop's Task Force on Regathering:
Julianne Allaway, Kevin Emge, Steve Godfrey, William Graham,
Patrick Hansen, Martha Lang, Kris Leaman, Ann McLaughlin,
Elizabeth Popplewell, Zeb Treloar, Meg Wagner