

St. Peter's Episcopal Church
Kerrville, Texas
A Modified Return to Public Worship:
Diocesan Protocols and Guidelines

Introduction

We have found ourselves in a most unusual time in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, and we did not imagine our lives to be caught up in so many changes and chances of *this* life. That said, I find comfort in the fact that we can return to what we know for certain about ourselves and our God.

We are a people shaped by Word and Sacrament, and for good reason, certain pieces of our liturgy *do not* change. I am reminded how we always begin the Holy Eucharist Rite One service. The architects of the Book of Common Prayer could not have predicted COVID-19, but they knew what Christians needed to hear in any time and place. We begin our worship with words from Scripture.

Hear what our Lord Jesus saith:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. *Matthew 22:37-40*

We will return to worship because we love God. We will return to a modified form of worship because we love our neighbor. The protocols to be put in place are because we desire to return to worship and we will do so with concern for the neighbor.

We know the risk of the disease cannot be eliminated, but it can be minimized. We will implement the following protocols to reduce the risk, and we will do so with love for our neighbor. Remember, dearly beloved, we are knit together in love.

Protocols for Facilities

- Staff or designated volunteers will 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). The staff will use Vital Oxide and Arcot for cleaning and disinfecting.
- The staff or designated volunteers will disinfect seats and/or pews between all services.
- Staff or designated volunteers will disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees.
- Hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectants will be readily available.

- Easily visible signs explaining hygiene best practices will be placed around the campus (use bilingual signs or signs for young children, as needed).
- No meals, food, or drinks (coffee) of any kind will be provided.

Protocols for Employees and Volunteers

- All employees and volunteers will be trained on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- All employees and ushers/greeters will be trained not to shake hands or embrace attendees.
- Employees and volunteers will be screened (see below) before coming into the church, congregation, or place of worship for potential signs of illness.

- Any employee or volunteer who has any of the following new or worsening signs and symptoms of possible COVID-19 will be sent home:

- Cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit, known close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19.

- Employees or volunteers with any new or worsening signs and symptoms, listed above, will be prevented from returning to work until the following criteria are met:

- For an employee or volunteer diagnosed with COVID-19: the individual may return to work when all three of the following criteria are met: at least three days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications); respiratory symptoms improve (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared;
- For an employee or volunteer who has symptoms that could be COVID-19, but does not get evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19: the individual is assumed to have COVID-19 and cannot return to work until the individual meeting the same three-step criteria listed above;
- For an employee or volunteer who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to work before completing the above self-isolation period: the individual must obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis.

- An employee or volunteer with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be allowed to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-quarantine period, from the last date of exposure.

- Employees or volunteers are required to wash or sanitize their hands upon entering church facilities.
- Employees or volunteers are required to maintain at least 6 feet of separation from other individuals.
- Employees, volunteers, and attendees will be asked to wear cloth face coverings or non-medical grade face masks over their nose and mouth.
- When attendees are present, face masks are required (detailed below, see Protocols for Protecting Attendees).
- People who are in the at-risk population will be encouraged to refrain from volunteering.
- We will keep the number of worship leaders to a bare minimum.
 - The more lectors, servers, greeters, etc. there are, the greater the risk. It also adds to the number of people that must be mobilized, trained, and equipped to lead worship under restricted conditions.
- Social distancing and other forms of protection will be used by clergy, when with others.

Protocols for Protecting Attendees

Worship services under these guidelines include Holy Eucharist, Morning and Evening Prayer (with or without Eucharist), Drive-In services, and Healing services; services on any day of the week are under these guidelines.

Communication

- All church protocols will be sent in digital and/or printed forms to church communication lists at least 2 weeks prior to our reopen date to let people know what new physical distancing and hygiene practices to expect at church.
- All protocols will be provided in written form to each person attending services before they enter the building.
- Printed copies of church protocols will be posted in easily viewable locations, inside all open facilities.

Sunday Services and Weekday Services

- We strongly encourage our congregation's at-risk population to participate in the service remotely.
- Childcare services will not be provided at this time.
- We will ensure proper spacing between attendees by asking attendees to:
 - 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.

- Sit only in designated areas or alternate rows between attendees, leaving approximately every other row empty.
- We strongly encourage that all attendees wear a mask or face-covering. We encourage attendees to do so in the spirit of loving our neighbor.
 - We will give masks to attendees who show up without one.
- We strongly discourage attendees from engaging in any physical contact with each other whatsoever, including shaking hands, hugging, fist-bumping, high-fiving, etc. whether in the building or elsewhere on church premises.
- We will prop open doors inside the building and to the outside, so that no attendee has to touch a doorknob or handle.
- If necessary or preferred, we will assign volunteers or staff to open and close doors for individuals as they come in and out.
- We will mark any locked interior or exterior doors, so that attendees do not try to open them.
- Public surfaces that are touched will be sanitized before, in between, and after each service. This includes doorknobs, altar rails, pews, contact areas in restrooms, hymnals and Books of Common Prayer, etc.
- Collection plates will not be passed. We will provide a container or plate in a place that allows people to give their offering without touching anything.
- We will continue to encourage online giving.
- We will provide online/digital service materials where possible.
- When needed, printed bulletins with the entirety of the service will be provided. The bulletins will be placed on the seats/pews designated for use at each service.
- Prayer books and hymnals have been removed from the pews. We will use a full-service bulletin or project the liturgy and lyrics on a screen.
- Printed bulletins cannot be reused from one service to the other and must be discarded.
- No “receiving line” will be held after church; Families and individuals will be asked to exit pew by pew and to maintain social distancing.
- We discourage gathering for conversation and fellowship after church.

Worship & Communion

- We will refrain from choral and congregational singing. Staff and designated volunteers will provide the music in our worship.
- Communion will be distributed in one kind only until further notice.

Preparation of Communion

- We will only use wafers (no homemade or store-bought bread).
- The clergy, Lay Eucharistic Ministers, and anyone assisting in the distribution of the sacraments must wash hands for 20 seconds, prior to the distribution of the elements.

- ❑ Washing hands properly is twice as effective as hand sanitizer. However, if hand sanitizer is the only option, servers should use it before communion.
- ❑ Altar guilds should follow all sanitary protocols for vessels and items used during services.

Consecration and Distribution

- ❑ The priest presiding at the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer is not required to wear a mask at that time. However, he or she should ensure that the bread, and wine, are covered during consecration, and that only the priest's host is touched.
- ❑ Clergy and Eucharistic Ministers are required to wear a face mask during distribution, covering nose, mouth, and chin. Gloves are optional. Several methods of distributing the Bread are acceptable, so long as proper protocols are followed.
- ❑ Diligently avoid hand-to-hand contact when distributing a communion wafer, even if wearing gloves, by dropping the wafer into the hands of the recipient. This reduces the risk of possible contamination from communicant to priest and by default, priest to everyone else.
- ❑ Communicants will receive the wafer while standing (no kneeling).
- ❑ Before the start of the Eucharistic Prayer, the clergy should remind attendees to remain standing while they receive communion.
- ❑ Train communion ushers to help recipients maintain six feet of distance between households while walking to the front for communion.
- ❑ Consider marking the floor with tape to indicate the 6-foot distance required between persons coming forward for communion, similarly to H-E-B and other gathering places

Spiritual Communion

- ❑ Before the start of the Eucharistic Prayer, the clergy will
 - ❑ Announce that attendees may remain in their pews if they are not comfortable with coming forward to receive the sacrament, and
 - ❑ Explain the theology of Spiritual Communion so that those who do not come forward to receive, as well as those watching from home, can understand the meaning of Spiritual Communion.
- ❑ After the Sacrament has been distributed, an appointed leader will lead those wishing to make a Spiritual Communion in a Prayer for Spiritual Reception of 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).