



# From the Bishop

The Right Reverend Cathleen Chittenden Bascom  
Tenth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas

## A message for the season after Pentecost 2020 from Bishop Bascom

May 29, 2020

Dear beloved members of the Diocese of Kansas:

I wrote in my May 1 letter about imagining our existence in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic as various spaces in which we meet the Risen Lord. As Pentecost unfolds, and county-by-county health officials offer varying health guidelines across Kansas, we have entered what I termed the Courtyard, the space where we first, cautiously, venture out from shelter-in-place.

I offer this guidance for the season after Pentecost:

- **I have every confidence in our clergy leadership, and they have my full support** as they make decisions in this complex situation. The canons of the church give parish clergy – rectors, and the bishop or those whom the bishop appoints (vicars and priests in charge) – full authority for worship and the use of spaces for worship. For various reasons, some of our priests may decide it is best to continue online worship and meet only in small groups in this period, and they have my blessing to wait. Others are ready to meet in person following our health guidelines.
- Whether worship is **online or in person or both, I am urging clergy to provide a Eucharistic service – spiritual communion or Eucharist in one kind – at least once a month.**
- I have turned to two deacons in our church who are also health professionals, Dr. Steve Segebrecht and Jim Cummins, to advise me on the following **best practices for the churches who are beginning to worship in person.**

### **These are the items things that must be observed by all parishes:**

1. A minimum of 6 feet distance is to be maintained at all times. This is extremely important. This is true for people when they are seated (family groups may sit together) and when they move from space to space. The number of people allowed in worship will thus vary based on the size of the space and the rules within each church's county.
2. Do not attend church unless you are feeling 100 percent well. Some people are simply safer at home and worshipping online. Some guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about people at high risk are attached.
3. Masks are very important. In this in-between everyone who worships in person needs to wear a mask. There is nothing political about this request. We have witnessed worship services – even Episcopal ones – becoming hot spots for the spread of the virus, and we must employ our best stewardship to prevent this. Strange at first, we wear masks to protect others – to love our neighbor. Masks also serve as reminders of all those who have

died during this pandemic and of our first-responder health professionals who wear them day and night.

4. No singing of hymns. Prayer Books should not be used. Bulletins or screens should contain all information for worship. Instrumental music or taped music is fine with distance. Plans for vocal soloists need to be submitted to me in an email for approval.
5. Clergy and leaders, such as lectors, should use microphones and keep their mask on while speaking unless they can keep 25 feet of distance from others and from where others will be. If there is that degree of distance, they may preach or celebrate without their mask.
6. When the Eucharist is celebrated, only the priest host should be touched. Wafers for the people should be covered by a cloth or contained in a closed vessel, and when they are distributed, they should be dropped carefully into the communicant's hands. The celebrant should be the sole person distributing communion, using freshly washed hands or a utensil such as tongs.
7. Consider outdoor worship. All guidance is that outdoor activities are a lower risk than those indoors.

Here are additional items that should be considered by clergy and lay leaders of every congregation:

1. It is best for one door to be an entrance and one an exit. Ushers should seat people in similar fashion to a wedding, and they have the important responsibility of helping people keep 6 feet distance going forward to the altar rail or baptismal font as well.
2. Greeters at entrances to the church will ensure masks are worn and that there is an orderly arrival into the narthex to meet an usher. If someone arrives without a mask, one will be provided to them.
3. Hands need to be washed, and hand sanitizer used, frequently.
4. Bathroom use is strongly discouraged, except in emergencies. If bathrooms are open, someone should be ready to sanitize after every user.
5. Baptisms should be postponed or performed with an aspergillum.
6. The church must be cleaned between services.
  - As virus particles remain in the air for a period of time, the church should be closed for a minimum of two hours before cleaning begins.
  - All horizontal surfaces must be cleaned.
  - Approved cleaning products such as Lysol may be used. A cleaning solution of 1/3 cup of bleach in a gallon of water, or a 70 percent alcohol solution, is also permissible.

I know this list is long and offers in-person worship that is not like anything we have done before. Perhaps, parishes might try to creatively translate items from this list of "thou shalt nots" into "thou shalt" small, sacrificial acts of kindness. A few of my own examples – small matters if they save lives:

- Joined in heart, mind and spirit, I keep 6 feet of distance from those not in my family.
- As strange as it may feel, I wear a mask with good humor and with a twinkle in my eye.
- Sunday morning I drink fewer cups of coffee, and don't need the bathroom at church.

Every blessing,

*+Cathleen*

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