



From the Bishop

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

Beginning Sunday, May 24, Episcopal churches in the Diocese of Kansas may open. No church is required to open until clergy and lay leaders discern it is safe to do so.

Summary of guidelines for churches in the Diocese of Kansas

- Churches may resume in-person worship on May 24, unless local authorities require a later date for group gatherings
- No church is required to resume worship in their building, and I will support whatever a church decides is in the best interest of its members
- Requirements of state and local officials on the number of people who can gather must be observed
- Everyone in church must keep 6 feet apart; family groups may sit together but remain 6 feet from other groups or individuals
- Churches need to mark their worship space to indicate seating that is 6 feet apart
- Everyone other than small children must wear a mask that covers their nose and chin
- Churches must keep a register of names of people attending in-person services for possible future contact tracing
- Services can include instrumental or recorded music, but no live singing
- No food or drink is to be offered at coffee hour
- Consider options for worship, both in-person and online (Morning Prayer, Spiritual Communion, Eucharist in one kind)

A letter from Bishop Cathleen Bascom

**In God's love there are many dwelling places:
sacred spaces and thresholds as Kansas opens after shelter-in-place**

May 2, 2020

Dear Beloved Members of the Diocese of Kansas:

In a scene toward the end of the Academy Award-winning movie *Lincoln*, after surveying the site of the last battle of the Civil War, President Lincoln, played by Daniel Day Lewis, sits pensive on a porch with General Grant (Jared Harris.)

Lincoln turns to Grant and says, "...I have never seen anything like it." Grant eventually replies, "We've won the war. Now you must lead us out of it."

By this analogy, I do not mean to suggest that the impact of the COVID pandemic equals the horrors of the American Civil War, nor that the battle with this virus is completely over. However, I imagine many of you, like me, may in fact shake your heads and say, "I've never seen anything like it."

A mid-March threshold

In our diocese, there was a threshold we crossed in mid-March, when we made the decision to shelter-in-place; to worship and feed the hungry without gathering; to be the Body of Christ and walk the Way of Love in creative ways both new and well-tried. Across the diocese, both clergy and laity have done this with courage and brilliance and spiritual fortitude.

As the State of Kansas will move next week toward a soft and careful re-opening of public life, we also must prepare to cross another threshold. Originally, most of us had the paradigm that we would shelter apart and then resume gathering as we had before the coronavirus arrived. With this "I've-never-seen-anything-like-it" experience, we may find ourselves grasping after dates and numbers, *when exactly...how many...?* Or even angrily rebelling or ignoring the wisdom and rules we receive.

However, major health protocols – like those from Johns Hopkins, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Imperial College of London and the World Health Organization – recommend a gradual re-entry. We must now all embrace that love of God, self and others requires **a phased approach**. Also, and complicating, are health officials' warnings that if the coronavirus resurges, we may again have to shelter-in-place.

PLEASE stay informed about the specific state, county and local guidelines, and heed them.

Many rooms for the Way of Love as we move forward

In light of varying numbers for safe gathering, and the forecast of possibly needing to cross back and forth over safety thresholds, I find it more helpful to think of these thresholds in terms of space and not time. Jesus says in the Gospel of John:

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going. – John 14:2-4

Instead of thinking of a timeline, let us think instead of a series of spaces or dwelling places. In each setting, the Risen Christ and the Love of God are real and present. As Jesus says, "...so that where I am, there you may be also."

I need to be clear: I am **not** requiring **any** church to gather in person at this point. However, after much prayer and discussion with the governor, the presiding bishop and other bishops, the Roman Catholic archbishop, the members of our Council of Deans and the Executive Committee of the Council of

Trustees, clergy and parishes that desire to begin in-person meetings or worship **may** do so **beginning May 24.**

Home and Garden and Online Worship (Shelter in Place as we are now)

This is where we are, and where we have been living the last six weeks. We may have to return here, too.

Many parishes, especially larger ones, may want to continue refining what is working now and stay put.

We have witnessed tragedy and loss. But there are many blessings, new skills, new relationships, new understandings of God that have emerged. We know that this space can carry the Gospel in its fullness.

- We pray more often and more earnestly.
- We can rest and not live at such a hectic pace.
- We may spend more time with family.
- We care for one another in our congregations through phone calls, letters and care cells.
- We creatively use new technology to worship and have reached many new people.
- We watch the planet Earth heal, and we spend much-needed time outdoors.

The Courtyard – Small in-person Gatherings and Early Re-Entry

This may well last three to 12 months

Some of our people and churches are ready, in this liminal in-between time, to gather in person for worship, fellowship and mission projects, even with social distancing and masks. Clergy and parish leaders, checking state and government cases and requirements, may facilitate these gatherings using the following guidelines. (They are summarized above and described in more detail below.)

The rules set by local health departments must be followed. It is the responsibility of clergy and wardens to know and follow the protocols of the State of Kansas and their county and civic authorities. We have very different contexts across our diocese, and our churches must continue to be safe everywhere.

People must keep 6 feet distance. People who live together (“families”) may sit closer together in the pews or chairs, but there must be 6 feet between every person or family group. According to my call with the governor, **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE TO KEEP!**

Parish leaders need to actually measure and mark their pews or chairs to guide people who return where to sit and how to keep distance.

People must wear masks (except for children age 2 and younger, who should not wear one).

Immediately the limit is 10 people. **By May 24 it may be that 30 people will be allowed to gather.** Later, the number goes to 90. These levels will be based on health metrics involving the number of local cases, the preparedness of hospitals, etc. It is the obligation of every priest in charge of a congregation (or senior warden in churches without a resident priest), to weigh whether or not their local circumstance makes it possible or wise to resume in-person services on this date, or a subsequent one.

Health of heart, soul, mind and strength all need consideration. The best interest of parishioners is to guide these decisions.

An option to consider is to have segments of the parish rotate in-person attendance and online participation – even over four Sundays. We may find more intimate relational cells actually build up the Body of Christ.

Priests and deacons must model self-care and determine if, because of their own susceptibilities or the needs of susceptible members of their family, they need to refrain from in-person gatherings for now. They have my full support for that decision.

It is advised to **keep a register** of everyone attending in case that information is needed for contact tracing later.

Older people or people with health conditions should take special care in deciding to return to worship or events. Safety for worshippers and their families is paramount, and no one should feel pressure to return to church until they feel ready.

At this time, only instrumental music or recorded vocal music will be permitted. We will revise this as soon as possible.

Coffee hour: no food or drinks. We will feast on companionship. Consider outdoor venues and remember to keep 6 feet distance.

Food ministries will continue in our “Feeding without Gathering” model of providing food to-go, until we learn from health officials that it is safe to do otherwise.

Small groups, either for Bible study or fellowship, or community groups such as AA, may meet, keeping to the maximum group size, with 6 feet distance between each and each person wearing a mask.

Options regarding the Eucharist and Daily Offices

1. Continue online worship, as your resources allow, for those who wish to participate from home.
2. Daily Offices with sermon are appropriate and simple.
3. Whether in-person or online, I urge parishes to consider the touchstone of keeping “Eucharistic worship” about once a month using the following options:
 - **Spiritual Communion.** In this practice we offer ourselves in thanksgiving to God, remembering what Jesus said and did at the last supper, in faith that we spiritually receive the benefits of Christ’s passion and resurrection. The blessed sacrament is reserved until we can all receive it together. This is akin to adoration of the sacrament as practiced on Maundy Thursday. Those who want to come forward to receive it spiritually may do so.
 - **Receive in one kind.** People approach the altar, keeping 6 feet between individuals or families. Hosts (not wine) are administered by a priest who washes his or her hands with water and soap immediately before distribution. He or she drops (not places) the host in a person’s two cupped hands.

I will be in conversation with the Presiding Bishop about individually wrapped communion elements and receiving in place as a possible third option.

Ordinations: Each candidate will be ordained individually on, or as near as possible, to the original date of June 13. They may choose this to be in their home parish or at Grace Cathedral. In each case, their parish priest, the dean of their convocation, a representative of Bishop Kemper School for Ministry or their seminary, and I are to be present. This leaves each person five additional participants if the civic gathering rule remains at 10 people, or 25 if the maximum number is 30. In all cases, we will keep 6-foot social distance in the pews, except for the laying on of hands.

Confirmations: on my scheduled visits Confirmation may occur following guidelines similar to those for ordinations. Clergy and confirmands may choose individual, intimate confirmations now, or postpone until next year or another time based on the bishop's schedule.

Episcopal visitations will focus on the Minster Teams and will resume May 24. Look for more information to come from my office soon.

Minsters and task forces may begin to plan in-person or online gatherings based on these guidelines.

The Full Church/Busy Market

Once again, in due time, society at large and our globe will again be our sacred dwelling place. When that time comes, we will undoubtedly be changed. Who knows, maybe we will look more like Christ?

Much now rests on the leaders, both clergy and lay, of each parish to be prayerful and wise. These people are the "Lincoln" of my opening story. God has sustained us well, and the Risen Christ will guide.

Every blessing,
+Cathleen

NOTE: *A flyer that summarizes these guidelines, as well as a list of tips from the Episcopal Church on gathering safely, are attached separately.*