



From the Bishop

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

November 11, 2020

Dear Beloved Members of the Diocese of Kansas:

In May 2020, we inched into various expressions of safe gathering, and I urged us to think of phases during this prolonged pandemic 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

While in recent months we have been enjoying more in-person worship and events in what I termed the “Courtyard” space, and while we praise God for the news of a possible vaccine shining at the end of this coronavirus tunnel, currently, cases are skyrocketing across our diocese!

Because of this, and in conversation with the Executive Committee of the Council of Trustees, **I am placing a moratorium on indoor in-person worship and other indoor events until at least Sunday, December 13.** We must move back into more online and outdoor spaces, with the hope that the virus spread will be better under control by Advent 3, 4 and Christmas.

Additionally, as a new church year unfolds, leaders of the Council of Trustees and I offer further guidance on our approach to the coronavirus as we head into winter months. Unless contradicted by a specific update here, my May 2 guidelines still stand (<http://www.episcopal-ks.org/news/Coronavirus.php>)

If it is possible to suspend indoor in-person worship as soon as this Sunday, November 15, please do that; indoor in-person worship must be suspended **by Sunday, November 22.** I will advise parish leaders on December 7 regarding the status of indoor in-person worship at that time.

Outdoor worship and events can continue to take place during this time; masks and 6-foot distance requirements remain in place.

Color-coded COVID guide will be provided each week

From now until Easter, each week diocesan staff will gather statewide health data from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and post on the diocesan website a color-coded guide that indicates the severity of COVID in each Kansas county where we have a church. Attached is the first such guide, based on numbers provided today. The color-coding is based on the standards we used to guide

plans for diocesan convention the 14-day averages of 10 percent test positivity rate, and per-week incidence rate of 100 per 100,000 cases.

I am requiring clergy leaders to check the status every week.

These are the three tiers and their meaning:

- **Yellow** (less than 10 percent test positivity **and** less than 100 per 100,000 incidence). Unless under a general diocesan moratorium, **parishes can conduct indoor in-person worship and other events.**
- **Orange** (greater than 10 percent test positivity **or** greater than 100 per 100,000 incidence). Unless under a general diocesan moratorium, **parishes can conduct indoor in-person worship and other events, but clergy and lay leaders must confer** and discern if it is wise to do so in light of what they know their local context and culture.
- **Red** (greater than 10 percent test positivity **and** greater than 100 per 100,000 incidence). **Indoor in-person worship and other events must be suspended for at least two weeks.** Return to indoor in-person worship and events is allowed **after two weeks** if a parish enters the Orange status.

If **levels** in the counties of more than half our parishes **rise above both** a 10 percent test positivity and a 100 per 100,000 incidence rate, I will meet with medical advisors and the Executive Committee of the Council of Trustees **to consider** suspension of indoor in-person worship and other gatherings for at least two weeks, across the diocese.

Below are **additional guidelines** for the period from now to Easter (with thanks to the Very Rev. Torey Lightcap of Grace Cathedral for resources that guided this framework).

Location, location, location

- I support any clergy leader who, after conversation with parish Vestry leaders, decides to suspend in-person worship or other gatherings for any period from Advent 2020 to Easter 2021. Leaders may want to track the status of their local hospital, including percentage of ICU beds available, in making this decision.
- By December 13 all clergy and lay leaders are to write and submit a description of their plan for gathering to Canon to the Ordinary the Reverend Patrick Funston by email (apfunston@episcopal-ks.org). This needs to include:
 - your current online offerings, and
 - your plans for indoor in-person worship and gatherings when the current suspension ends.
- The size of your space is very important. Continue to seat family units with the 6-foot distance guideline. Everyone attending any indoor in-person worship service or other event still must wear a mask if they are over the age of 2.
- So far, online and outdoor worship, along with our physical distancing and mask rules, have protected many Episcopalians. Continue them!

Ventilation, ventilation, ventilation

- When gathering in-person, meet outdoors whenever possible. (Coming from northern Iowa, I experience Kansas winter as fairly mild. Think Scandinavian: bundle up and stay healthy.)
- Consider outdoor, distanced caroling in masks, with low volume or humming.

- Seek to use indoor spaces that are larger and have rapid air-exchange systems.
- In older buildings, pre-heat the worship space and turn off the blowers during worship.
- Cleaning protocols remain important, but we are advised that there is low risk in using Prayer Books during one service a week. If worshipping more often, consider preparing fully printed bulletins and encouraging people to bring their own Prayer Book.

Duration, duration, duration

- Plan and implement shorter worship services and gatherings, including shorter sermons. I will allow one reading and the gospel during this period.
- Perhaps offer more services and events, each for fewer people. Some school systems have used this method successfully.

Participation, participation, participation

- We have learned that it is extremely important that attendees sign in or register for worship and events. **Parishes are required to do this**, if they have not already been doing so. In addition, parishes **must alert** all who were present when anyone at a service or event tests positive.
- If a parish member knows they have been exposed, self-quarantine for 14 days from date of exposure is standard practice even with a negative test result. We strongly recommend parish leaders call in the county Health Department for additional guidance.
- Check temperatures and do other symptom screening before gatherings, when viable.
- Bring your own coffee and treats instead of pouring and sharing. Our medical advisors say that if you have to take your mask off to drink something, you shouldn't be drinking it in community. Straws are okay slipped under masks.
- Continue to use carry-out containers for feeding ministries.

Appreciation, appreciation, appreciation

- Return many meetings and gatherings to an online format for winter months. We have seen how well Zoom and Facebook, along with pre-recorded services, are able to connect us.
- Keep up the satisfying but demanding practices of in-person and online offerings whenever possible.

Amplification, amplification, amplification

- Singing inside is still prohibited, but when outside, singing while wearing a mask and more than 6 feet apart is a lower risk.
- Please use microphones whenever possible, ideally with users wearing masks. The more that soloists, preachers, lectors, teachers use mics and **do not** project, the better.
- Limit the number of people who use a lectern, pulpit or music stand on any given day.
- This is a wonderful time to discover the blessings of non-wind instrumental music resources you may have, including pianos, cellos and guitars.
- Soloists or vocal ensembles may sing if they are at least 30 feet away from others, and preferably masked.
- Practice “spiritual hymnody” – pray the lyrics while instrumentalists or soloists provide the tunes.

One of our medical advisory members, Deacon Steve Segebrecht, M.D., offers a piece of wisdom borrowed from our Kenyan siblings via Kansas to Kenya: when it comes to actions in winter 2020-2021, listen to the Swahili “*pole pole*” (pronounced “polay polay”) and *take it slowly*.

Whatever space we must inhabit to stay safe this winter, we will seek God with joy, knowing that the Risen One is with us and that in God's love there are many dwelling places.

Every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cathleen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'C'.

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Tenth Bishop, the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas