



## ECMN Re-Gathering Plan V4

In this fourth iteration of the ECMN Re-Gathering Plan, we have only included the information that we deem most useful for faith community leaders as you make decisions regarding when and how to re-gather. **The one major change between Version 3 and Version 4, is the removal of the statewide positivity metric for faith communities to enter Phase 1.5 or Phase 2. Due to the size of the state, this metric is not as helpful as it could be for faith communities as they determine levels of risk for gathering in their specific communities.**

These next few months will likely be just as dynamic as the previous months have been, with both joys and sorrows that we cannot now predict. We continue to seek to walk faithfully together, discerning the movement of the spirit, offering and receiving grace, and recognizing that God is leading and guiding us through it all.

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### Definition of Terms

**Phase:** The level of restriction that we are currently exercising given the current positivity rate and governmental protocols in place.

**Health Characteristics:** Minnesota-specific health and safety metrics that dictate which phase we are in.

**Faith Community Guidelines:** Directives from the Bishop that must be followed during a given phase.

**ECMN Building Use Task Force:** A task force that provides insight and input into policies regarding building use for ECMN and faith communities and reviews faith communities’ plans to reopen buildings. Members of the task force are The Rev. Tim Kingsley, Mike Reymann, The Rev. Joy Caires, Dr. David J. Inwards, Rachel Babbitt, Ellice Chelgren, and Bishop Loya. Others will be consulted (including additional medical professionals and subject matter experts) as needed.

### Faith Community Action Steps

1. Review this document thoroughly
2. Convene your COVID-19 team (lay and clergy leaders of your faith community)
3. Review the sample Regathering Plans

4. Create your Regathering Plan for phases 1.5 (office use, essential ministry, and tenants) and phase 2 (general building use and in-person worship) in consultation with faith community leadership and outside groups that use your building.
5. Obtain the approval of the clergy person/warden and the Bishop's Committee or Vestry.
6. [Use this form \(https://bit.ly/ecmnplan\)](https://bit.ly/ecmnplan) to submit your plan to the Building Use Task Force for review. This form will ask you to identify a main contact person.
7. Representatives of the Building Use Task Force will review the plan and may reach out to your contact person for clarification or to recommend further planning in a specific area.
8. The Task Force will send you a message if and when they think your plan appropriately accounts for all necessary areas of safety.

*If you have any questions or concerns in planning, please reach out to Rachel Babbitt, who is the first point of contact for the Building Use Task Force. You can reach her at [rachel.b@episcopalmn.org](mailto:rachel.b@episcopalmn.org).*

## Phases and Faith Community Guidelines

Phase	Health Characteristics	Faith Community Guidelines
Phase 1	Governor's Stay at Home Order	Church buildings are to be closed.
Phase 1.5	Governor's order lifted; 7-day positivity rates of the county of the faith community have trended over 5%	Church buildings may be reopened for use by clergy, church employees, volunteers and businesses or organizations operating in church buildings
Phase 2	7-day positive rates of the county of the faith community have both trended below 5%.	Church buildings may be reopened for ministries, outside groups, and limited capacity in-person worship.
Phase 3	Negative community spread, mass vaccination	Church buildings will be fully open and worship and Eucharist will resume as normal, with online options where appropriate.
Phase 4	Health	Learning, Growing, Integrating

**\*\*Please note that just because you *could* meet in-person, does not mean you *have* to meet in-person. Any gathering does create risk, so please assess your context and mitigate the risk as much as possible.**

## Positivity Rate

The positivity rate refers to the percentage of COVID-19 tests that come back positive each day. The positivity rate has emerged as a useful metric to understand the rate of COVID-19 spread in a community. The 7-day positivity rate is an indicator of how numbers and case rates are trending over time. The county and overall state positivity rate metrics are published in the weekly news and can be found online here: <https://episcopalmn.org/covid19-response>. As of **February 16, 2021, ECMN will use only the faith community's county positivity rate as the metric for gathering in person.**

## Vaccinations

Vaccination rates will continue to increase throughout the winter and spring. As vaccinations increase, the positivity rate will decrease, which will allow us to move into Phase 2 and beyond. Until the CDC or the Minnesota Department of Health release more specific or nuanced recommendations, we will continue to require mitigation strategies be in place in order to gather in person, regardless of how many in each community may have been vaccinated.

## Discernment Questions

Navigating these next few months will require just as much prayerful discernment as has the entirety of leading amidst this pandemic.

- **Build a team of leaders** to discern a path forward and create a plan. Think about the ministries and activities that occur in your faith community. Having leaders from these groups involved can help make sure the plan is comprehensive.
- **Let values lead.** Consider the values of your faith community and how those values can guide you as you approach this process of discernment and planning.
- Ask yourselves, **what is going well in this season** of physical distancing? Then ask the question, what are we longing for? How can you plan in order to meet those longings, rather than simply returning to what was? How can you keep what's going well as you return to in-person gathering?
- Get to **know the numbers** as it relates to COVID-19 and your community. What unique characteristics of your community might influence those numbers over time (an influx of tourists over the summer and fall, students on college campuses, etc.)?
- **Check in with your members.** Consider creating a survey or some other method of checking in with members of your faith community to determine their level of comfort with potential plans for re-gathering in person and indoors, or for particular ministries to be opened.
- **Plan for flexibility.** A lot can change from one day to the next. There is no guarantee that the process of reopening will be linear, so how can your plan take that need for flexibility into account? How might you respond if your faith community building needs to close again? How will that be discerned and communicated?

## Sample Plans

Over the past several months, many faith communities have submitted plans. Find below three example plans that can be utilized when crafting a plan for your faith community.

[St. Mark's Cathedral Reopening Plan - Minneapolis MN](#)

[St. John the Evangelist Regathering Plan, St. Paul, MN](#)

[Grace Memorial Church Reopening Plan - Wabasha, MN](#)

## Questions for Consideration in Planning for All Phases

### Follow-up and evaluation

- Where will you keep this plan?
- How will it be accessible to those who need it?
- How will this plan be re-visited over time (after 2, 4, 8 weeks)?
- How will you assess how the safety protocols are working?
- What are you learning about yourselves as leaders that you want to take with you to the next phase?
- How are you addressing cross-training if someone becomes sick? How can essential duties be performed if one or more people are ill? What is the plan to scale back what needs to be done if there are not adequate volunteers to do the work? [This document can help plan for that.](#)
- How will you address the possible increase of workload for leaders when in-person worship/ministry *and* virtual programming are underway?
- How might you take the lessons you have learned about virtual programming and online offerings into your continued work?

### Regression in phases

- Who will be tracking the country trends so that you know if there is a spike in the community?
- Who will determine, and how, that the church building needs to be closed?
- How will you communicate that your building or ministry is no longer open?

# Guidelines for Reopening Church Buildings

## Phase 1.5

*In Phase 1.5, church buildings may be reopened for use by clergy, church employees, volunteers and businesses or organizations operating in church buildings.*

[Click here for resources from the CDC](#), which provide guidance for many of the areas of planning listed below.

For faith community staff and volunteers to return to offices, for the resumption of tenant business or organizational operations of partners using the church building, or for the return of ministries to the church building, please make plans for the following:

- The spaces and rooms that will be used, and those that will remain closed.
- A capacity limit in any given room and in the church building at large.
- Entrance and exit of staff, volunteers, and faith community members when using the church building to prevent bottle-necking.
- Tenants' entrance, exit, and overlapping use of space in the church building (i.e. walkways, bathrooms, kitchen, etc.).
- Communicating safety guidelines and expectations to all those who will be in the space.
- A screening protocol to determine if those allowed to use the space are healthy (the Minnesota Department of Health recommends [this screening tool](#)).
- Signage with clear explanations of safety protocols and expectations for anyone using the space regarding:
  - Physical distancing
  - Wearing masks in common spaces
  - Washing hands thoroughly and often
  - Staying away if exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19
- The regular cleaning of bathrooms and common spaces.
- Cleaning protocols for spaces and rooms between usage that abide by COVID-19 cleaning standards (see [MDH recommendations](#)).
- A system to track who has used the space and when (for contact tracing).
- A communication protocol for those using the space, should someone test positive for COVID-19.
- Assessing, and if necessary, improving, the building ventilation to ensure it is in proper working order.
- Deciding which ministries are essential (must continue) and how you can adapt them for COVID-19 protocols.

## Guidelines for Reopening Church Buildings

### Phase 2

*In Phase 2, church buildings may be reopened for ministries, outside groups, and limited capacity in-person worship.*

In addition to the planning considerations listed above in Phase 1.5 for office spaces and rooms in buildings, as faith communities plan to return to in-person indoor worship, the following should be planned for:

- Limiting capacity of worship spaces to allow for physical distancing (6 feet or more between individuals/families who live together). How will you enforce and/or prevent more people from showing up than permitted?
- Ensuring maximum capacity is not exceeded during service.
- Safety protocols and expectations for those using the space regarding:
  - Arrival screening
  - Physical distancing
  - Wearing masks in all spaces
  - Washing hands thoroughly and often
  - Staying away if exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or in the event of exposure to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19
- Communicating safety guidelines and expectations to all those who will be coming to worship.
- Removal of and substitutes for commonly touched items (Hymnals, Bibles, etc.)
- Safety protocols for liturgical elements of the service, including Holy Eucharist (find resources in [Appendix G](#)).
- A system to track who has used the space and when (contact tracing).
- A communication protocol for those using the space, should someone test positive for COVID-19.
- Entrance and exit of the space during and throughout worship to prevent bottlenecks.
- Sanitization of:
  - Individuals' hands
  - Door handles
  - Pews/chairs
  - Bathrooms
  - Nurseries/Sunday School rooms
- Hospitality and greeting in a no-touch environment (propping doors open, ensuring all those who enter know the safety protocols and what to expect, preventing congregating indoors after service).
- Cleaning before and after each gathering to abide by COVID-19 cleaning standards (see [MDH recommendations](#)).

## Appendix A

### Best Practices for Liturgies, Lay Eucharistic Ministers, & Pastoral Care

During COVID-19 any worship service, gathering, or meeting with parishioners should follow all risk mitigation protocols. Create a plan using the templates above and use these plans as you gather.

#### Pastoral Care

- In-person, face-to-face pastoral care is permitted following the protocols of the housing setting (i.e. long-term care facilities have protocols for visits).
- If an in-person meeting is essential for someone who is in their own home (non-facility so not otherwise regulated), meet outside or through a window, wear masks, and remain 6 feet apart from each other.
- Share prayers for use by the sick and their loved ones from the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and Enriching Our Worship 2 (EOW2) by email or post.
- For those in hospitals and medical facilities, connect with the chaplains in the facility to ask about how they might provide direct spiritual care. Staff chaplains often carry oil for unction.

#### Lay Eucharistic Ministers

- Connect with your church leadership to determine COVID-19 regathering plans around this ministry.
- Ensure that LEMs are trained regarding COVID-19 protocols.
- If an in-person visit is essential, meet outside, wear masks, and remain 6 feet apart from each other as much as possible.
- Consecrated bread only should be shared while wearing gloves.
- Pre-packaged consecrated host and wine may be used.

#### At the Time of Death

- The Prayers at the Time of Death, BCP p. 462-466 are suitable for lay people to use. Share these with family members, hospital chaplains, or even a nurse if you can reach them by phone.
- Clergy or pastoral caregivers may offer such prayers over the phone with the receiver at the ear of the patient if allowed. If that is not allowed by the hospital rules, you may pray these prayers on their behalf, with or without the family on the phone.

## Burial

- A service may be held to inter the body. Such a service must have no more than 15 people (including officiant), keeping 6 feet apart and wearing masks, and must be brief.
- An outdoor service is preferred to better mitigate risk.
- Burial rites and memorial gatherings are to be held following the Regathering Plans of the faith community and not having more than 10 people in the building.
- Consider living-streaming the service to allow others to attend virtually.

## Eucharist

Bishop Loya offered a theological reflection and framing of Eucharist in this time that can be found [by clicking here](#).

### During Phase 1.5

#### Spiritual Communion

Spiritual communion is the practice of observing a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, either virtually or in person, and being assured of receiving the spiritual benefits of communion without physically consuming the bread and wine. This concept is well established in our tradition, and authorized by the Book of Common Prayer (BCP, 457).

#### Pre-packaged Eucharist kits

Purchasing pre-packed Eucharist kits that include pre-portioned wine and wafers may be used. This is the only method currently approved for Eucharist in both forms.

#### Home Eucharist

After a livestream or recorded liturgy, clergy and/or Eucharistic Visitors are permitted to go to a person's home to pray the short form for Communion Under Special Circumstances with masks and physical distancing observed. Eucharist should be in bread form only.

#### Drive-Up Communion

Invite individuals to drive to the church property following a livestream or recorded Eucharist, and together, praying the form for Communion Under Special Circumstances either standing outside or remaining in their cars. Eucharist should be in bread form only, unless pre-packaged kits are used.

If these practices are adopted, it is, of course, critical to observe mask wearing and physical distancing, and to deliver the sacrament in a way that does not require multiple persons touching it (i.e., using compostable cups or pre-packaged communion wafers, etc.).



## During Phase 2

All participants should:

- Wear a mask at all times.
- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly (after touching your face, or touching items that others have touched).
  - Sanitizing hands is secondary to washing hands. Not all hand sanitizers are created equal. The most effective way to ensure sanitization is to use 72-90% alcohol in a spray bottle, and to sanitize no more than once between hand washing.
- Limit the amount of time individuals are in an enclosed space or in proximity to others. ECMN recommends the shortest amount of time possible as there is always risk when gathering.
- Ensure that there is no physical touching between persons.

When performing the Eucharist, you should:

- Minimize the amount of people touching objects:
  - Having one person set the table and handle the holy hardware before and after services creates the least amount of potential transmission.
  - Limit those involved with handling the elements and Eucharistic setup, and ensure everyone in the altar party has access to hand washing and sanitizing throughout the service, including ushers.
- Cover vessels at the altar.
- Distribute bread only.
- Use wafers instead of bread (to minimize touching).
- Use tongs to put the wafers into communicants' hands (to reduce chances of transmission).
- Maintain over 6 feet of distance between households as individuals come forward to receive communion and return to their seats. Consider using signage or marking the floor to remind folks of the protocols.
- Maintain a rigorous cleaning regimen for all frequently touched surfaces.

For those interested in a rubric that walks through the performance of the Eucharist step-by-step, see this guidance developed by a priest in the Diocese of Nebraska. It is not a requirement that all clergy use this rubric; rather, it is provided as a resource ([it can be found on page 7 of their document, linked here](#)).

## Appendix B

### Outdoor Gatherings Guidelines

The guidelines for health and safety in an outdoor gathering remain the same as for an indoor gathering. Namely:

- Maintaining physical distancing--family units keep 6 feet apart
- All participants wear masks at all times. The person giving the sermon can unmask while giving the sermon, if they are properly physically distanced from everyone.
- Still no handshakes, high fives, or hugs
- Provide ways for folks to sanitize hands if it is necessary to touch common surfaces
- Look through and create plans based on the templates shared on page 3 of this document.

For details of MDH's Minnesota Stay Safe Plan, [click here](#).

Here are some planning considerations for outdoor gatherings:

- **Inclement weather:** sheltering inside the church building should not be an option, so have a plan to follow if/when there is inclement weather, particularly if weather turns inclement suddenly.
  - If you opt for something like a tent, make sure that it's open on all sides (because otherwise, it's basically like being inside).
- **Bathrooms:** think through where folks can use the restroom when needed, and follow cleaning and sanitizing protocols.
- **Seating:** if possible, encourage folks to bring their own seating (this cuts down on commonly touched surfaces, and therefore diminishes risk).
- **Continue online gatherings:** remember that there are folks who cannot and should not gather in person, so as you move to gathering in-person, think through how you can include those who cannot gather.
- If there are any commonly used items or spaces, please create a plan for cleaning them based on the [guidelines from MDH](#).
- **Sound system support:** being outdoors makes it more difficult to hear, so think about utilizing sound amplification.
- **Singing:** It is recommended that only a soloist sings.
- **Printing vs. Books:** we recommend that you use print materials or projection for any and all gatherings.
- **Eucharist:** bread only, distributed in individual, compostable cups

- **Streaming Online:** streaming an outdoor gathering can be difficult - particularly with the signal strength necessary to livestream, and with the difficulty of sound amplification. So have a plan for how to make services available to those who will not be able to attend.

## Appendix C

### Planning Ideas

#### Limit Gathering Size

While gathering sizes are limited, consider creating a sign-up, breaking groups up by last name, or creating an online 'ticket' to separate households and ensure the number of individuals in the space at a given time is limited.

#### Passing the Peace

Consider waving, bowing, or crossing your hands over your heart.

#### Collecting Offerings

Consider placing an offering plate or secure box at the doors to the worship space. Continue to offer online giving if possible. Do not pass a plate or basket during the worship service.

#### Virtual Worship

Consider a hybrid model in which services and group gatherings are available both online and in-person.

#### Touchless Worship

Create a bulletin that contains all the items needed for the worship. Remove the Bibles, hymnals, and other commonly touched items throughout the space. Prop open doors for airflow and create one-way paths to prevent bottlenecking. If creating a paper bulletin is too costly, time-consuming, or wasteful, consider projecting worship slides.

#### Greeter role

Create a space for the greeter to remain 6 feet from the entryway. Include propping open doors in the greeter's responsibilities. Have a table near the entry where bulletins are placed, and have the greeter invite people to pick up the bulletin themselves.

#### Sanitizing Hands/Use of Gloves

Wearing gloves is discouraged, as they can actually spread the virus from one place to another. Instead, all those who touch common surfaces are advised to wash their hands regularly and should have access to hand sanitizer.

#### Choir

Singing indoors is discouraged at this time. If you must have singing, consider having only a soloist, and plan for considerable distancing (greater than 10 ft) between the singer and others in the congregation. The singer must be masked.

## Appendix D

### Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “How Coronavirus Spreads,” March 4, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>

Governor Walz Executive Orders: <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/execorders/eoresults?gov=all>  
(listed by most recent first)

Guidelines for Opening Up America Again: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>

Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security’s Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors:  
[https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs\\_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/reopening-guidance-governors.pdf](https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/reopening-guidance-governors.pdf)

\*\*Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 data overview: <https://mn.gov/covid19/>

\*\*Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 modeling overview:  
<https://mn.gov/covid19/data/modeling/index.jsp>

Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 modeling 2.0, updated April 28, 2020, presentation:  
[https://mn.gov/covid19/assets/MNmodel\\_PPT\\_FINAL%204.10.20\\_revised%2020200501\\_tcm1148-430665.pdf](https://mn.gov/covid19/assets/MNmodel_PPT_FINAL%204.10.20_revised%2020200501_tcm1148-430665.pdf)

National Coronavirus Response: A Road Map to Reopening:  
<https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/national-coronavirus-response-a-road-map-to-reopening/>

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](https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf)

\*\*Sites that regularly update Minnesota’s COVID-19 case data.