



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF ALBANY GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW DURING COVID-19

As of May 2021

At all times when gathering for worship, or carrying out ministry within the Church during the pandemic, keep in mind how the coronavirus spreads and take appropriate precautions to guard against becoming infected or possibly infecting others. The guidelines below have been created, considering both the CDC and New York State guidelines for religious and funeral services. These are minimum guidelines and local clergy are encouraged to apply stricter measures as they consider appropriate in order to safeguard and promote the health of their congregations and local communities. These guidelines shall be followed by any group using the church. The continued use of virtual means of communication and providing services on line is encouraged.

SOCIAL DISTANCING & GATHERING CAPACITY

- For any service or church gathering, limit the congregation to no more than 50% of the maximum occupancy for a particular area. As state and local capacity allowance increases, churches may adjust assuming proper social distancing can be maintained. Outdoor services may be held, given social distance is maintained. *RNY Par. #1*
- A distance of 6 ft. must be maintained between individuals at all times, except for members of the same household. *RNY Par. #3*
- Those in attendance should avoid physical contact when passing the peace and greeting one another. *RNY Par. #6*
- Multiple services are authorized, provided the worship space is cleaned properly between services, or seating is alternated to avoid potential cross contamination between one service and the other.

MASK WEARING

- Masks are to be worn at all times by those in attendance, except when at their pew as long as a six foot distance is maintained between household groups. *RNY Par. #10*
- Masks must be worn while singing, unless a minimum distance of 12-feet can be maintained. *RNY Par. #3 & #7*
- The clergy must wear masks when in close proximity to others, but the celebrant is NOT required to wear a mask while at the altar, provided the bread and wine are covered with a linen or pall. Clergy are not required to wear a mask while proclaiming the Gospel or preaching, provided they are at least 10 feet away from the nearest person. *RNY Par. #10*
- If all members of the altar party (Priest, Deacon, Acolyte) are fully vaccinated they do not need to wear a mask while serving at the altar. *(CDC Document Page 5 & 6)*
- Lectors may remove their masks while reading the lessons, provided they are at least 10 feet from anyone in front of them. *RNY Par. #10*

COMMUNION SAFETY

- Communion will be received in only one kind (the host/bread). It will be placed in the hand of the recipient, not on their tongue. The celebrant will consume the consecrated wine on behalf of the people. Individual communion cups with wine for the congregation are NOT authorized.
- Communion will be received while standing, preferably at the head of the center aisle, or it may be taken to people while in their pews or seats. It is important to maintain appropriate social distancing while people come to receive communion. Please give instructions for one way traffic in aisles.
- For those requesting a blessing rather than communion, blessings will be offered over the person while not physically touching the head of the person being blessed.

HYGIENE & SANITATION

- Hand sanitizer must be used by all people when they first arrive at Church and again right before going to receive communion, for indoor services. We recommend having a designated person distribute sanitizer.
RNY Par. #16
- Altar guild members and clergy must thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water before setting the altar. Clergy must also clean their hands with hand sanitizer before distributing communion.
- If there are any baptisms, the clergy must cleanse their hands with hand sanitizer before and after the baptism as well as wear a mask. The Baptismal water will be poured outside or in a piscina following the service. The water will not be saved for use as Holy Water. All Holy Water fonts must be emptied.
- Appropriate cleaning and disinfecting agents (for the surface being cleaned) will be used. Common areas such as bathrooms as well as often touched items such as door knobs, light switches, handrails, etc...need to be cleaned on a regular basis. The NYS Dept. of Health or CDC websites can provide some guidance.

COFFEE HOUR & FOOD SAFETY

- Coffee hour type gathering are permitted, however 6 ft social distancing remains in effect as does mask wearing when not seated.
- If food is offered, consider pre-packaged options and avoid buffet or family-style meals.
(CDC Recommendations for food served at gatherings)
- If food is to be served, designate an individual to serve so that multiple people are not touching the same utensils. The server must wear a mask and gloves and wash their hands prior to serving.
- The use of disposable and paper products are encouraged. Individual cream/sweetener packets should be used as well to avoid touching a common container.
- An individual setting up the coffee station and making the coffee should wash their hands prior to their work, wear a mask and gloves.

COMMUNICATION

- Clear, respectful signs informing people of the expectation and requirement of wearing masks, social distancing, and the use of hand sanitizer (all outlined above), as well as other necessary instructions, need to be posted near all entrances of the Church and other prominent locations.
RNY Par. 24
- It must be regularly communicated and posted that if people are not feeling well or have been in contact with an individual with COVID-19 they should not come to church. If exposed, fully vaccinated individuals may come to church as long as they are not experiencing symptoms.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- The collection plate should not be passed, but rather be placed in a location that parishioners may access it to make their offering.
- The bread and wine should be placed on the credence table by the altar guild prior to the start of the service, and not brought up at the time of the offertory.
- Congested areas need to be avoided, especially as people are trying to enter or leave the Church, as well as the communion line and other times when people tend to bunch up. Again, social distancing is very important. Clergy may stand to the side following the service (out of the flow of traffic) if someone needs to speak to them.
- If possible (especially during the warmer weather) keep the windows and doors of the Church open to improve air circulation with fresh outside air.
- To cut down on potential cross contamination, parishes may want to print out the service for everyone to have their own copy as an alternative to the use of Prayer Books and Hymnals. If Prayer Books and Hymnals are used, they will need to be sanitized if they are to be used again within three days.