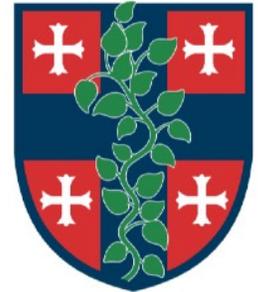


Short-Term COVID-19 Response Team Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire Frequently Asked Questions



Why are Roman Catholics having Eucharist and we are not?

Different denominations are doing different things with the Eucharist depending on their sacramental theology, centrality of Eucharistic worship, and risk tolerance. Roman Catholics do not have much of a tradition of corporate worship other than the Eucharist, whereas we have had a strong tradition of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer as central worship services which is also easier to do virtually.

Roman Catholic church buildings also tend to be larger, with more room for a robust air exchange and an ability to accommodate a reduced number of worshippers with relative safety. Many Episcopal churches, on the other hand, are smaller, with limited capacity for air exchange, and reach their reduced-capacity attendance limits at an impractically low number of persons.

Why can we go to the grocery store but not to church?

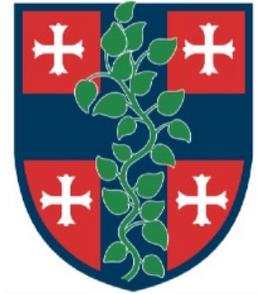
There are not a lot of options for getting food – one can't shop/eat virtually. The level of risk goes up with groups in confined spaces over a period of time where droplets can be shared. Grocery shopping and worship are fundamentally different activities, and the buildings in which they are conducted differ. Grocery and other large stores, generally speaking, have high ceilings, air circulation, and wide aisles. When people shop, they keep moving, passing each other briefly and not lingering. Talking is minimal. Churches vary widely in size, shape, ceiling height and air circulation. In-person worship would involve a group of people speaking and breathing the same air for an extended period of time. The science tells us that the longer we stay in one space, the less air circulation there is, and the more we speak, the higher the risk of transmission of the virus. The diocesan guidance is geared toward mitigating this risk by encouraging outdoor and virtual worship.

What are the various creative ways that NH churches are gathering online?

Churches in New Hampshire are offering the following forms of liturgy for their primary worship:

- Liturgy of the Word - also called Ante-Communion, this service is the first part of the normal Eucharistic service, but without the Liturgy of the Table.
- Sunday Morning Prayer - following the form in the BCP with the Sunday lectionary.
- Holy Eucharist with Spiritual Communion – with the priest offering Holy Eucharist at the church building alone or with a couple of social distanced helpers. The elements are consecrated but not

consumed, and those present through Zoom, Facebook or YouTube join in a prayer of spiritual communion, uniting themselves with Christ spiritually, since they cannot consume the elements.



- Many churches in NH are offering these services live, beginning at a certain time via Zoom meeting or webinar, and through Facebook and YouTube live streaming, with prayer requests in the chat section. Some churches are pre-recording their services and offering links to the recordings to be watched at any time.
- Most churches are offering music in some form – some are offering a virtual choir performance, others are offering live musical performances online, others are sharing pre-recorded music.
- Various churches are also offering midweek services, mainly around the daily office.
- Clergy are encouraging their parishioners to “visit” other churches on Sundays they are not available – such as the diocesan service or Bishop’s visitation, a neighboring parish, or the National Cathedral.
- In Advent and continuing in Epiphany, the Bishop offered an experimental liturgy with an Agape meal – an opportunity for households to provide their own bread and drink and offer prayers over them and consume them together, in a sacred meal that stops short of communion, but offers spiritual sustenance in our exile. This was done by the Bishop and various parishes also offered this.

What are some in person experiments that churches in New Hampshire have tried?

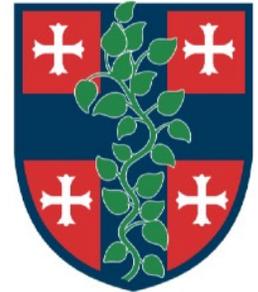
- Some churches are offering outdoor, in person services, when weather permits. Some of these are services of Holy Eucharist, with distribution of communion via “kits” or with parishioners bringing their own bread and wine to be consecrated and consumed.
- Some churches have offered “parking lot” Holy Eucharist where parishioners attend in their cars, bringing their own bread and wine that is consecrated and then consumed in their cars.
- Some churches have offered an online Holy Eucharist service, with parishioners invited to drive to the church and pick up the consecrated communion elements after the service.
- Some churches are offering the opportunity for parishioners to enter the church for private prayer, with appropriate mitigation (distancing, masks) and disinfection (cleaning, hand sanitizer) in place.

When will we resume public worship and public gatherings?

All non-essential public worship and public gatherings are suspended until the infection rates we are currently experiencing subside. Our standard remains the same as it has been: a test positivity rate at or below 5% for the county in which the church is situated and/or the area it serves; and a daily new cases rate (7-day rolling average) at or below 7 per 100,000. While we cannot know for certain when we will return to such infection rates, it now appears highly likely it will not be before Holy Week, 2021.

Should clergy do emergency pastoral calls such as prayers for the dying or hospital calls to those facing life-threatening surgeries or illness?

Yes – provided appropriate safety protocols are observed. Clergy have a pastoral responsibility to tend to the critically ill and the dying. Clergy called to such circumstances should take every precaution to safeguard themselves and the person to whom they are ministering, including wearing hospital gowns, masks, and rubber gloves where necessary and available. Clergy who are themselves ill should ask a clergy colleague to cover for them if an emergency situation arises. Clergy should also recognize that hospital and other healthcare authorities may impose quarantines that prevent them from visiting persons with contagious diseases. You may wish to call ahead to be sure you will be admitted.



How do we record online worship in our congregational registers?

The instructions recently published for the 2020 Annual Parochial Report call for including only the first ten Sundays of 2020 in calculations of Average Sunday Attendance – so it is not necessary to include online worship in that calculation. For online worship beyond those first ten Sundays, to the extent that your online platform allows you to know the number of participants you have, use that number. Otherwise, simply note “Online – number unknown.”

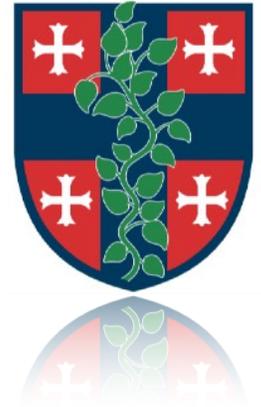
Canon Michael Barlowe, Executive Officer of the General Convention, has issued a statement on which subject, which reads in part: “Senior church leadership is aware that there may be some anxiety about how to document attendance at such digital worship services, but our message is ‘Do not worry about this.’ Most congregations and dioceses will record the number and kind of worship (Morning Prayer, streamed Eucharist, etc.); and list the virtual attendance separately as ‘virtual attendance’ or a similar designation, using whatever counting their digital media allows.”

Can we continue our food pantry/feeding ministry/soup kitchen?

Many of our churches have essential feeding programs for people living with homelessness or for other marginalized people. Keep these points in mind:

- Make sure that those leading and participating in the programs are trained in proper health procedures and protocols specifically related to COVID-19.
- Consider distributing pre-packaged “take-out” meals rather than gathering people at serving counters and tables.
- Consider limiting numbers of volunteers distributing food and restrict the area from which food is being distributed.

- Wear gloves to hand out non-perishable food and other items.
- If you need to serve food, please ban self-service buffets and have all food served in individual containers, or by food servers wearing gloves. Do not allow other people to handle the serving pieces.
- Wash all dishes in a dishwasher rather than by hand, as the water heats to higher temperatures and the dishwasher cleans more thoroughly.
- Use paper goods if you do not have a dishwasher in the church.



How do we handle tenants or other groups who rent or use our space?

We strongly urge that all public gatherings in our buildings be suspended until further notice so they do not contribute to continuing the community spread of COVID-19. Congregations should be aware that any public gathering held on their premises carries with it a responsibility on their part to ensure that proper disinfection procedures and protocols are followed before and after the gathering.