



Reopening Guidelines

VERSION 1

JUNE 18, 2020



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN VERMONT



Letter from Bishop Shannon

Dear People of God in the Diocese of Vermont,

The diocesan Restart Team has developed the following five-phase plan for returning to in-person worship across our diocese. This plan takes into account the [Centers for Disease Control's guidelines](#) for faith communities as well as guidance from the [Vermont Department of Health](#) and the [Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#).

We are currently in Phase 1 of this plan, with our buildings closed and in-person worship suspended. But beginning today, congregations may begin to develop and then submit plans for Phase 2, which allows for building use by clergy, staff and wardens only. Once a plan for Phase 2 has been submitted, approved and implemented, a congregation may submit its plan for Phase 3, which allows for in-person outdoor worship. Essential feeding programs continue to be permitted at every phase of the plan. Other outside groups, such as 12-step recovery, may not take place in church buildings at this stage.

I will communicate with the diocese when we are ready to accept plans for Phases 4 and 5. This timing will be based on advice from medical and public health experts. As you are likely aware, Vermont is [one of twenty-one states](#) that recorded an increase in daily new cases last week. It is clear that the spread of this virus remains an active concern. While we may see other local institutions choosing a different or more accelerated approach to reopening, our Christian commitment to protecting the most vulnerable calls us to remain as vigilant as possible.

The Centers for Disease Control and the Vermont Department of Health continue to advise people 65 and older, and those with underlying medical conditions, to remain at home. I endorse this advice for all Vermont Episcopalians, including clergy serving in congregations.

Given the age of many of our congregants and clergy, and the cost and effort required to meet the necessary cleaning and distancing requirements, I am aware that some congregations may choose to continue worshipping and gathering exclusively online until a vaccine has been developed or the virus is demonstrably under control. I fully endorse this decision.

I have been praying with members of our diocese during twice daily Zoom worship services since mid-March. This experience has demonstrated to me that online worship can truly be an experience of worshipping in community. When I sign onto

Zoom worship, I enter church – it is as simple as that. I see familiar faces on my screen and hear the familiar voices of those who dial in from landline phones each day. We settle into the familiar pattern of our liturgy and we pray together for our loved ones and for the concerns of the world around us. While I know we would all prefer to be gathering in person in our buildings, these digital tools allow us to continue to experience Christian community in real and meaningful ways as a diocesan household and as individual congregations. Make no mistake -- if you are providing online worship and remote gathering, your church is open.

When our churches first canceled public in-person worship in March, I wrote that I hoped we would continue to worship and minister together as the Body of Christ, to take special care of those among us who find themselves most isolated, to remain in touch regularly and to make sure congregants have their most basic physical and spiritual needs met. It is clear to me that you have done this and more during these last three months.

Whether your congregation submits its plan for Phase 2 as soon as possible or intends to remain in Phase 1 for some time, please know that we are all the Body of Christ and we are all still church. I thank you for your resilience and for your creativity in following Jesus and embodying the hope and love of God in this time.

Peace and blessings,

Bishop Shannon

Introduction

The Diocese of Vermont's plan for reopening includes requirements for resuming in-person worship as of June 18, 2020. The plan outlines procedures for five phases of reopening.

As of June 18, 2020, all Vermont congregations are in Phase 1 with their buildings closed and in-person worship suspended. Some congregations may determine that remaining in Phase 1 until there is a widely-available vaccine is the safest choice in their context. The Restart Team and Bishop Shannon support this choice. As of June 18, 2020, the Restart Team will consider plans for Phases 2 and 3 only. They are in consultation with safety and health professionals, and will communicate with diocesan leaders when they can submit plans for Phases 4 and 5.

Those congregations who do wish to move to the next phase as outlined below must submit a detailed plan for doing so using the form found at the end of this document. Congregations are encouraged to convene a working group responsible for producing and submitting reopening plans for each phase. Submit your plan to the Restart Team by [emailing the Rev. Fred Moser](#). Once a congregation receives approval, they may implement their plan for the next phase.

All plans must conform, at a minimum, to the requirements set forth in the protocols outlined below. All plans are subject to ongoing review at any stage of their implementation. All plans will be subject to suspension in the event of a resurgence of the virus in Vermont. Please note that a congregation may not skip a phase. For example, plans to move directly to Phase 3 will not be accepted at this time.

Movement from one phase of reopening to the next will be at the discretion of the bishop, under the advice of medical professionals and the Vermont Department of Health. Coaching is available from Restart Team members to assist with developing a plan. Request coaching by [emailing the Rev. Fred Moser](#).

During all phases, clergy, staff members and wardens should remember the importance of staying home if they do not feel well. Any sign of a sore throat, new cough, or "feeling a bit under the weather" is a strong signal to stay home and maintain physical distance. Church leaders (clergy, staff and wardens) should also be mindful that the Vermont Department of Health continues to advise people aged 65 and over, and people with underlying medical conditions, to remain at home – this includes clergy and includes gatherings of any size.

Protocols for Moving to Phase 2: Building Use for Clergy, Staff and Wardens Only

Worship

- If all protocols below have been met, and a plan has been submitted to the Restart Team and approved by the bishop, church clergy, staff and wardens may film worship in the church building at this stage.
- All present must maintain 6 feet of distance from each other and must maintain facial covering throughout the service.
- Only instrumental music, other than woodwinds, may be included in the service. Recorded music is permitted.

Building Use

- Only clergy, staff and wardens may enter and use church buildings (offices, sanctuary, parish hall, etc.). All those who enter the building for any purpose must wear facial coverings (masks) and maintain proper social distance of at least 6 feet.
- Those entering the building are restricted to areas essential to that staff person's work.
- No use of kitchen facilities by staff.
- Staff should be encouraged to be in the building at different days/times if this is possible.
- Keep time in the building as brief as possible, with other work being conducted remotely.
- As much as possible, staff should work in discrete areas or offices.
- Any common surfaces (doorknobs, phones, touch pads, switches, keyboards) should be sanitized immediately before and after every contact.
- No visitors are allowed into the building.
- Deliveries are made outside the building.
- Paperwork is kept to a minimum, with electronic communication and record-keeping used as much as possible.

- Persons needing to speak to a staff member should do so by phone or electronically, not in person.
- Essential feeding programs continue to be permitted. Other outside groups, such as 12-step recovery, may not take place in church buildings at this stage.

Church Meetings and Other Gatherings

Meetings, formation groups or any other church activities should continue only online. In-person group meetings taking place in the name of the church in homes, restaurants, parks or other indoor or outdoor public places are not permitted.

Clergy, Staff, Wardens, Vestry Members and Health Officers Must Complete VOSHA Training

This guidance extends to all phases of the plan.

In accordance with Vermont's requirements, Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA) "Protecting the Safety and Health of Workers" health and safety training must be completed by all clergy, staff and lay leaders (wardens and vestry), including designated health officers (see below). Copies of certificates of completion must be submitted as a part of any reopening plan, and copies of certificates are to be kept at both the parish and the diocesan office. Training can be found at (click on "View Online" or "Print and Review"): <https://labor.vermont.gov/vosha>.

If new clergy, staff, wardens or vestry members start work in a congregation during any phase, they must complete VOSHA training as outlined above.

Appoint Designated Health Officers

This guidance extends to all phases of the plan.

Each congregation will appoint at least two designated health officers. Health officers are responsible for collecting contact tracing data during worship services. Each health officer must complete VOSHA training.

At least one designated health officer must be on-site any time people are present in church buildings or at church events during Phases 4 and 5. During Phases 2 and 3 (when indoor worship is not yet permitted) a contact tracing record of who has been in the building and when must be kept, but this can be reported to the health officer remotely. There must be one designated health officer for every 20 people present at any given event. Designated health officers will be

responsible for ensuring compliance with [Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development guidance](#). Health officers will have the authority, working with the clergy person in charge, to stop or modify activities to ensure church activities (including worship) conform to health and safety requirements. Health officers will also oversee the process of attendance record-keeping.

This record-keeping applies to both public worship in Phases 3, 4 and 5 and the use of the building by clergy, staff and wardens throughout all stages. The purpose of the health officer is to ensure that screenings take place for all who enter church buildings, and a record is kept of each person's contact information to facilitate contact tracing by the Vermont Department of Health, if necessary. A daily log will be kept to record these screenings. The health officer's responsibilities include:

- Maintaining daily logs of all who enter the building, including contact information (see contact tracing section below).
- Ensuring that people who come into the church buildings for any reason follow established guidelines for staying home when sick, maintain social distance when they are well and in the building, and wear face coverings (masks) at all times.
- Working with leaders of outside groups that plan to use church buildings in Phase 4 and beyond to assist them in complying with these guidelines.
- Barring entry to the church building to those who refuse to comply with health and safety guidelines or those who are showing COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., new onset of cough, fever, loss of taste/smell). Please refer to ACCD guidance: <https://accd.vermont.gov/news/update-new-work-safe-additions-stay-home-stay-safe-order>.

Begin Facilitating Contact Tracing

This guidance extends to all phases of the plan.

A record of every attendee (including all staff and clergy) must be created by a designated health officer at every gathering of any kind, either indoors or outdoors throughout all stages of reopening. The attendance record will also include the date and time of the event. It will be the responsibility of a designated health officer at the entrance to record names and contact information for all attendees. Contact information will include phone, email address if available, and physical address. Such information will be kept confidential by the health officer and saved for the exclusive use of the Vermont

Department of Health in case of a need for contact tracing. It must be made clear to anyone participating in a church event that this data will not be used by the church. The attendance record will be kept available for 30 days or longer as stipulated by the Vermont Department of Health.

Implement Building Maintenance and Cleaning Practices

This guidance extends to all phases of the plan.

Cleaning and disinfecting of all touchable surfaces (including restrooms) must be done prior to and following each event or service during all phases, and prior to and following every day that staff are present in church buildings. Restrooms must be cleaned and re-sanitized each day. Signage directing people to wash hands is encouraged. The following link provides print resources from the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc&Search=wash>. A record of dates and times of all cleanings will be kept.

Water should be run through the system (i.e., flushing toilets and running sinks) well before the building is occupied, so as to flush any bacteria out of the system.

The following link is for information on acceptable cleaning products and methods: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

It is suggested that items that may be touched and passed along to others -- such as prayer books and hymnals -- be removed from spaces that will be occupied.

Protocols for Moving to Phase 3 When Outdoor In-Person Non-Eucharistic Worship May Resume

In-person non-Eucharistic worship held outdoors may resume after an updated plan for Phase 3 has been submitted to the Restart Team and approved by the bishop. These protocols apply to any worship service, including weddings and funerals. As with Eucharist, baptisms may not take place during public worship at this phase. Safety procedures and restrictions implemented in Phase 2 remain in place. In this phase:

- Attendance will be limited to 25 people.

- Congregations should consider using an online church management system, such as Realm, or a free online event service such as Eventbrite to take reservations for worship to ensure attendance does not exceed capacity.
- Congregations may consider holding more than one worship service per day in order to keep under capacity. Plan in advance to manage those who show up without reservations.
- Schedule services to prevent those leaving one service from presenting social distancing challenges for those arriving for the next.
- Worship may not take place without the presence of a designated health officer. The designated health officer(s) will instruct or lead attendees in maintaining safe distance and wearing face coverings (masks), will maintain an attendance record, and will ask attendees unwilling to comply with safety guidelines or showing signs of respiratory illness to leave and join in worship from home. There must be at least one health officer for every 20 people present. The clergy person officiating during worship may not act as designated health officer during that event.
- Spots will be marked clearly on the ground showing where people may stand in order to maintain safe distance. Immediate family groups may stand together (up to 4 members is suggested). Congregations should have extra masks and hand sanitizer available.
- Attendees who may need to sit during worship services should be advised to bring their own folding chair from home.
- Prayer books and hymnals should not be used. Explore the possibility of limiting or avoiding the distribution of printed worship materials. Encourage people to download the bulletin to a phone or smart device before arriving at the service. If paper worship materials are used, consider placing them in designated spots in advance.
- Because worship leaders must wear masks throughout the service, it may be necessary to use an amplification system in order for a socially distanced congregation to hear.
- Gathering inside will not be permitted if inclement weather or other conditions prevent conducting worship outdoors. Encourage those present to join in online worship.
- Virtual (online) services will continue throughout this phase.

Pastoral Care

One-on-one pastoral care meetings may take place outside during Phase 3 under the same conditions outlined for worship: social distance of 6 feet must be maintained, face coverings (masks) must be worn, and the meeting must be reported to a health officer for contact tracing records.

Protocols for Moving to Phase 4 When Indoor In-Person Non-Eucharistic Worship May Resume

- While outdoor worship is preferred when possible, in-person non-Eucharistic worship may resume indoors after an updated plan for Phase 4 has been submitted to the Restart Team and approved by the bishop. These protocols apply to any worship service, including weddings and funerals. As with Eucharist, baptisms may not take place during public worship at this phase. Safety procedures, restrictions and attendance limitations implemented in Phases 2 and 3 remain in place.
- All areas acceptable for seating and distancing will be clearly marked, including aisles. Immediate family groups may be seated together (up to 4 members is suggested). A designated area where people may wait for safe entry while maintaining social distance is recommended. “Traffic control” signage is also recommended. Helpful signage can be printed from the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>.
- Designated health officers must continue to be present at all worship services and any church gathering. There must be at least one health officer for every 20 people present. The clergy person officiating during worship may not act as designated health officer during that event.
- Virtual (online) services will continue throughout this phase.

Pastoral Care

One-on-one pastoral care meetings may take place inside during Phase 4 under the same conditions outlined for worship: social distance of 6 feet must be maintained, face

coverings (masks) must be worn, and the meeting must be reported to a health officer for contact tracing records.

Use of Church Buildings by Outside Groups

Use of church buildings by outside groups may be considered at Phase 4.

- Generally, no outside group may use church building(s) until a very low incidence of disease has been maintained over a 30- to 45-day period.
- Essential building use may be permitted with approval of the bishop and concurrence of rector or clergyperson responsible, and assurance of adequate sanitizing measures between uses (possible examples might be 12-step recovery groups).
- No use of church kitchens.
- All must wear face masks and maintain minimum 6-foot physical distancing. Procedures implemented in Phases 2 and 3, including contact tracing and cleaning, must be observed.

Protocols for Moving to Phase 5 When In-Person Eucharistic Worship May Resume

In-person Eucharistic worship will be permitted when an updated plan for Phase 5 has been submitted to the Restart Team and approved by the bishop. The safety procedures and restrictions implemented in Phases 2, 3 and 4 remain in place.

Pastoral visiting to homes, nursing facilities and prisons may resume at this phase, as long as visitors adhere to any restrictions or requirements set forth by the Vermont Department of Health and by the facilities to be visited.

Reopening Plan Worksheet for Phases 2 and 3

Name of congregation

Location

Primary contact name

Primary contact email

Primary contact phone number

For which phase of reopening is this plan being submitted (2 or 3)?

Name of clergy in charge (if applicable)

Name of senior warden

Name of junior warden

Names of those on reopening planning team

Names of designated health officers

Addressing the topics that follow is part of our call to love one another and keep one another safe. Reopening plans are not meant to impose arbitrary restrictions. Rather, they are meant to establish life-sustaining procedures, and allow us to meet and minister in the safest ways possible. Please consider and respond to the following questions in developing your reopening plan:

For those applying for Phase 2

How will you ensure initial and ongoing sanitizing and disinfecting of your physical plant, according to the specifications presented in this document? Will you hire an outside company, or will you rely on staff and/or volunteers to accomplish this?

How will you handle sanitizing doorknobs, restrooms, and other “high-touch” areas?

How will you communicate your safety plan and re-opening practices to the congregation?

How will you pastorally deal with people ignoring protocol (e.g., not wearing masks or maintaining social distancing)?

How will you prepare your congregation in the event we experience a subsequent wave of virus infections and hospitalizations, and need to return temporarily to more assertive forms of distancing or other measures?

Given only instrumental and recorded music will be permitted, how will you work with church musicians and choirs to honor their ministry while at the same time honoring your commitment to the health and safety of the congregation?

For those applying for Phase 3

With persons in high-risk categories (those over age 65 and/or those with underlying medical conditions) likely to continue staying at home, how will you reach and serve them at this phase?

How will you maintain an online worship option once some members have returned to in-person gathering? Will the way you conduct worship online change?

Is your clergy leadership comfortable returning to in-person worship?

How many people can your outdoor space accommodate if you worship in family groups and remain 6 feet apart? How many services will be required to accommodate everyone wishing to attend an in-person service, given the limit of 25 people? How will you decide who attends and when? How will you cap attendance by parishioners if you also intend to provide room for unexpected guests to join you? Will services/events need a reservation list or other logistical coordination? Who is responsible for this coordination?

Will you continue small group gatherings such as Bible studies or other formation groups online?

How will you handle worship bulletin disposal (if applicable)?

How will individuals and families move between their vehicles and church buildings before and after services, while maintaining 6 feet of distance between themselves and other groups? How will you ensure that masks remain in place as

individuals enter and leave church grounds? How will you advise parents to prepare young children to worship with the new restrictions?

The Parish Reopening Plan should be signed by the rector and both wardens. The vestry will approve the parish plan, and it will be attested by the clerk, including date of vestry approval, before being forwarded to the diocesan office along with records of completed VOSHA training by all members of clergy, staff, wardens, vestry and health officers.