



**A Journey By Stages:
Gathering, Serving & Growing as
The Episcopal Church in Massachusetts
During & Beyond a Time of Pandemic**

*Pictured: The Midstate Trail extending through the center of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
Photo: All Trails/Susan Serra via www.onlyinyourstate.com*

**Expanded Guidelines for Stage Two:
Holy Communion
Pastoral Visits
Holy Baptism**

These guidelines are an extension of the Stage Two protocols in “A Journey By Stages” issued in May 2020. They pertain specifically to the distribution of Holy Communion and the ministration of Holy Baptism. All other protocols of Stage Two remain in effect, provided they are in accordance with the directives of the Massachusetts Governor’s Office, including current attendance limitations. The Governor’s directives, including building capacity percentages, are subject to change at any time.

Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts
www.diocesewma.org



Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
www.diomass.org

August 6, 2020

Dear People of the Episcopal Church in Massachusetts,

This document, “Expanded Guidelines for Stage Two,” is offered as a supplement to “A Journey By Stages,” the document presented to our two dioceses in May 2020. This supplement provides protocols for the administration of the two dominical sacraments, Holy Communion and Holy Baptism.

Through the summer months your bishops have continued strongly to encourage congregations opting to refrain from in-person public worship, providing virtual opportunities for all aspects of church life until public health considerations suggest otherwise. Where congregational leaders conclude that local conditions allow for limited in-person gathering, such worship has been permitted under strict guidelines since July 1.

We know well the deep yearning for full sacramental practice in the church, and your bishops share the grief many of you are experiencing due to the pandemic-imposed eucharistic fast. These guidelines provide for limited administration of Holy Communion and Baptism in places where they may be practicable. A word on Confirmation will be forthcoming.

Even as we prepare to issue these guidelines, however, sobering reports suggest the need for extreme caution. Daily case counts, seven-day average test rates and hospitalizations are all rising in the Commonwealth. Many experts predict a second surge soon. Given these realities, we underscore the following:

1. Permission, not Persuasion: The following protocols for cautious administration of the sacraments, as vetted by health care experts, are authorized at this time. Nevertheless, no clergy or congregational leaders should feel pressured or obliged to undertake them. Local circumstances continue to vary dramatically, including the capacity to implement safety requirements consistently; architectural design and adaptability; the prevalence of risk factors among your membership, clergy and staff; and other factors particular to your situation.

2. Prepare to Reverse: Every congregation should be prepared to return to the restrictions of previous stages in the event of future surges or positive tests and contact tracing within the congregation. All remain accountable to state and local guidelines, and—as we have said—to honesty with ourselves! Neither faithful prayer nor wishful thinking allow us to risk the well-being of self or neighbor.

3. Consider the Most Vulnerable: Many congregants and staff members will be advised to remain at home on account of risk factors, or will feel safer doing so. Congregations should continue to make inclusion and support of these members a key factor in all decisions about regathering and sacramental ministry. For this reason, and given the very real possibility of resumed closure and tightened restrictions during pandemic surges, the section of these guidelines containing Directives for Pastoral and Eucharistic Visitors is particularly important. Where resumed participation in Holy Communion becomes possible, it must be shared as widely as possible.

The weeks and months ahead remain shrouded in uncertainty. But we have learned much in the past five months about how to worship the God who sustains us; how to remain in community with one another; how to serve the world around us; how to be the church even in these trying times. May we continue to live with patience, forgiveness, sacrifice and courage.

Faithfully in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Douglas J. Fisher
Bishop of Western Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates
Bishop of Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris
Bishop Suffragan of Massachusetts



Theological and Liturgical Foundations for Regathering

As Episcopalians, we consider reason and scientific research to be expressions of divine wisdom. As we consider how to return to sharing Holy Communion, scientific and medical data have been in the forefront of our considerations, and rightly so.

Grounding our common life is a still deeper and more lasting reality: the Gospel as mediated by our theological and liturgical tradition. Our “journey by stages” is guided not only by the gift of science and reason but also by our tradition’s understanding of liturgical worship and the way in which our liturgy shapes us as the Body of Christ.

So how do we approach this part of the journey in a way that is both scientifically grounded and consistent with our Anglican/Episcopal tradition? Here are some questions and reflections that informed the development of the protocols that follow. We encourage you to use them as teaching and talking points as you prepare your congregation to reengage in the liturgy of the Eucharist:

What is liturgy for?

Back in March, the necessary call to cease from in-person worship, and thus cease from the sharing of the Eucharist, came suddenly; so abruptly, in fact, that we had little or no opportunity to reflect on the situation before it arrived. Understandably, many of us were overwhelmed with a sense of loss, of being deprived of the very foundation of our spiritual lives as individuals and as communities. It was natural and easy to be driven primarily by a visceral and painful question: Where is my sacrament? What will I do without communion?

Over the past months, we have learned some of the answers to those questions. We have learned that living without the Holy Eucharist is hard and painful. We have also learned that we can survive, and that even after all these months, we are still being nourished and strengthened by all those experiences of Holy Communion which happened in our lives before this pandemic.

We have learned that while the blessed bread and wine are something we consume, the sacrament of Communion cannot be reduced to a consumable product. We are learning to ask new questions, about how the liturgy (not only of the Eucharist, but of Baptism and other sacraments) works in our lives, and why and how the embodied, physical presence of the community matters. We are realizing that asking “How will **we** be nourished” rather than “How will **I** be nourished” grounds our decisions scripturally, cultivates forbearance for those at higher risk of infection and reveals issues of justice.

How are the Body of Christ and communicating bodies connected?

Another question we have learned to ask is what does it mean to us to be physical bodies in communion with one another, while maintaining the physical distancing so necessary to keep each other safe? Holy Eucharist, along with other sacraments, is inherently and by definition an embodied, corporate act. For a while, we have

had to keep our bodies distant from one another; but that does not mean that we ceased to be the Body of Christ, nor does it mean that we have not been able to experience communion. We have learned to probe the question, how do we experience communion with Christ and with one another even when we are physically separated? How is Holy Communion both like and distinct from other experiences of communion? How is the Spirit at work in the moment when one person offers the sacrament to one other person, saying “The Body of Christ”?

What is “the beauty of holiness”?

An ecumenical group¹ working on guidelines for worship and sacraments during the pandemic has reminded us of the centrality of the experience of beauty in worship, and the way beauty instills awe and draws us toward God. This group has also suggested that “In a time of physical distancing, we must also learn to find beauty in silence and simplicity.” Until a vaccine eradicates the pandemic, gathered worship will lack many of the elements whose beauty we have been accustomed to enjoying, such as choral anthems and congregational hymns. We are learning to ask the question, What does beauty look like now? How can we become more attuned to the simple beauty of our prayers without any embellishments? What do we need to learn to do – as lectors, intercessors, preachers and assembly – so that the beauty of the liturgy shines forth in all its unadorned simplicity? When all this is over, we will be glad we learned these lessons, for they will serve us well even when the choir is back and we are singing with gusto.

What does love look like?

The most important question we have learned to ask is, “What does love look like in the midst of a pandemic?” Our liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments are themselves an answer to this question at any time, as the expressions of the love of God in our midst. Our worship is guided by the demands and gifts of love; any time we are wondering how or whether to move forward, we must ask whether what we are about to do looks like love, especially for the most vulnerable in our midst. The ecumenical group¹ mentioned above puts it this way: “During this pandemic, love of neighbor requires careful planning. Because we love God, we want to offer worship that brings our very best. Because we love our neighbors, we want to do everything we can to make sure we bring no harm to anyone when we gather.”

As you and your community move toward gathering in person for worship and celebrating the sacraments for which we all long so deeply, we hope that these questions and reflections will inform and support your work. In this time, love looks like all of you, and all of us, seeking to be faithful to our God, to the riches of our tradition and to each other.

¹ The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship and Sacraments, convened by The Rev. Dr. L. Edward Phillips, Associate Professor of Worship and Liturgical Theology, Candler School of Theology, Emory University; The Rev. Taylor W. Burton Edwards, Pastor and Consultant; and The Rev. Larry Goodpaster, Bishop-in-Residence, Candler School of Theology, Emory University. The document is available for download in English and in Spanish [here](#).



Preparation and Distribution of Holy Communion

Instructions to the Altar Guild

- Altar Guild members are to wear a mask at all times during preparations for a celebration of Holy Eucharist.
- Altar Guild members are to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately prior to beginning their preparations.
- If gloves are to be worn for preparation, hands should be washed and/or hand sanitizer applied immediately before putting on gloves in every instance. Gloves are easily contaminated, so a ready supply of disposable gloves is desirable.
- If possible, only one Altar Guild member should prepare Communion vessels. If multiple Altar Guild members are involved in preparation, they should keep physical distance of six feet. If less distance is necessary, the time should be as brief as possible and no more than 10 minutes in all.
- All vessels are to be washed thoroughly with soap and water prior to and after the service.
- Altar Guild members should wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizer prior to handling vessels.
- A sufficient amount of hosts is placed in an appropriate vessel. Individual hosts are preferred. A large host may be placed on a paten for breaking at the Fraction. If local practice is to use a loaf, it must be cut in a sanitary manner into individual portions prior to the service rather than tearing it at the distribution.
- If there are to be multiple Communion stations, a separate vessel is to be prepared for each station.
- Bread to be reserved for the Communion of those unable to be present should be placed in individual plastic bags.
- Only individual sealed Communion packets, as opposed to loose wafers, are to be reserved for the Communion of those unable to be present.
- A small amount of wine is placed in a cruet or chalice. A small amount of water may be placed in a cruet.
- The covered vessels are to be placed on a credence table near the altar, or on the altar.

Instructions to the Celebrant, Deacon and Eucharistic Ministers

- The celebrant, deacon and eucharistic ministers wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water before the service and/or use hand sanitizer immediately before the preparation of the Holy Table. Use of the traditional lavabo is not sufficient.
- All wear clean masks throughout the liturgy of Holy Communion and the entire service.
- At the Offertory, a deacon or eucharistic minister brings the bread and wine to the altar on behalf of the people. Offertory processions are not to take place.
- As few people as possible are to handle the eucharistic elements and vessels prior to the distribution of Communion.
- Ideally, the celebrant leads the Eucharistic Prayer standing back from the Holy Table.
- The bread and wine are to remain covered throughout the eucharistic prayer.

- The celebrant speaks at a low volume to reduce aerosols. Neither chanting by the celebrant nor sung congregational responses are permitted.
- At the words of institution, the celebrant approaches the Holy Table to lay hands on, briefly, the covered vessels containing bread and wine.
- At the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the celebrant may extend hands, or make the sign of the cross, over the bread and wine. To minimize contact with vessels and elements, other manual acts during the eucharistic prayer are discouraged.
- At the Fraction, the celebrant again approaches the altar and breaks the bread in silence.
- The celebrant receives the bread and, if desired, the wine at that time or later, as local tradition may indicate. No others are permitted to consume from the chalice. The celebrant will use hand sanitizer again before serving others or, if receiving after the distribution, will use hand sanitizer before receiving.
- The celebrant may extend an invitation to Communion, saying, “The Gifts of God for the People of God,” or another invitation.
- Individual Communion packets prepared for visits to those unable to be present should remain at the altar to be delivered to a eucharistic visitor after the Communion of the people, or be placed immediately in the aumbry or another appropriate place for reservation of the sacrament.

Instructions for the Distribution of Communion

- The eucharistic ministers take their places at stations where the distribution of Communion is to take place.
- Ushers may direct households or individuals to a Communion station for receiving. Households are to maintain six feet of spacing between one another.
- Floor markings to assist with appropriate distancing are desirable.
- Minimize opportunities for parishioners to pass one another in aisles by creating one-way traffic patterns to and from Communion stations, or allow households or individuals to return to their seats before allowing another individual or household to approach the Communion station.
- Alternatively, the eucharistic ministers may serve communicants at their seats to reduce movement. This may be a better pattern for churches with a single aisle or tight spaces.
- Communicants continue to wear masks while approaching the Communion station.
- Communion is to be distributed with the people standing, preferably in a place where there is ample space to prevent crowding.
- Only the eucharistic minister is to touch the paten or other vessel.
- It is desirable to have hand sanitizer available for use by communicants as they approach and depart from the Communion station.
- High-touch surfaces, such as hand rails, altar rails and kneelers, are to be avoided.
- Standing at arm’s length, the eucharistic minister says the words that accompany distribution, remaining masked and in a quiet voice to reduce aerosols.
- The eucharistic minister is to drop the bread or wafer into the opened palms of the one receiving while avoiding touching their hands. Pressing the bread into the palm or delivering it on the tongue is not permitted. If accidental touching occurs, the eucharistic minister is to use hand sanitizer before distributing to anyone else.
- The communicant should step away from the Communion station at least six feet before lifting their mask briefly to consume the host.

- Any remaining consecrated bread and/or wine is to be reverently consumed (or committed to the earth). Loose wafers from vessels that have been used for the distribution of Communion are not to be reserved for use at subsequent services. As indicated above, individual Communion packets prepared for visits to those unable to be present may be placed in the aumbry or another appropriate place for reservation of the sacrament.
- The celebrant and any other eucharistic ministers are to sanitize their hands immediately after the distribution of Communion is concluded.



Pastoral Visits to Homes, Hospitals and Care Facilities

General Directives for Pastoral and Eucharistic Visitors

- Those who are at higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19 are strongly encouraged to remain safer at home and to refrain from attending in-person worship services or church activities.
- Until the threat posed by COVID-19 is truly gone, we discourage pastoral visits at homes, hospitals or nursing care centers except when it is deemed pastorally necessary.
- Pastoral and eucharistic visits are to be kept to 10 minutes or fewer.
- Pastoral visitors are to observe the protocols of the hospital or care facility at all times.
- Pastoral visitors are to maintain physical distancing, wear a mask at all times and use hand sanitizer before and after each visit. Physical touch in these settings is to be avoided.
- The eucharistic visitor is to bring the greetings of the congregation and offer prayer for the communicant.
- If desired, individual Communion packets with consecrated bread may be delivered from or obtained at the church for consumption at home during a livestreamed or pre-recorded broadcast of the liturgy.

Instructions for Pastoral and Eucharistic Visitors

- Communion packets are to be prepared by the Altar Guild prior to a service of Holy Eucharist.
- Hands are to be washed thoroughly with soap and water immediately before the preparation of Communion packets. A mask is to be worn throughout the preparation of the Communion packet.
- Sufficient bread for distribution to a household is placed in a sanitary plastic bag. An order of service and other communications from the church may be placed in a separate sanitary plastic bag.
- Arrangements are to be made ahead of the visit to ensure that the eucharistic visitor is expected and welcome. If possible, the eucharistic visitor should secure a phone number to announce their arrival.
- The communicant or a caregiver should, if possible, prepare in advance of the visit a flat surface, covered with a clean cloth, on which the Communion packet may be placed.
- The eucharistic visitor is to wash hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer immediately upon entering the room.
- The eucharistic visitor is to wear a mask (and other personal protective equipment, as required) at all times during the visit.
- The eucharistic visitor is to maintain six feet of distance except when placing the Communion packet on the table and/or administering Communion. Contact closer than six feet is to be kept at an absolute minimum.
- Standing at arm's length, the eucharistic minister says the words that accompany distribution, remaining masked and in a quiet voice to reduce aerosols.
- The eucharistic minister is to drop the bread or wafer into the opened palms of the one receiving while avoiding touching their hands. Pressing the bread into the palm is not permitted.
- If the eucharistic visitor must assist the communicant in receiving the bread, they are to apply hand sanitizer immediately before and after distribution. Delivering Communion on the tongue is permitted only if the communicant is unable to receive by hand.



Holy Baptism

Preparation for the Baptismal Liturgy

- **Baptism, especially when a young child or a person who is at higher risk is to be baptized or is among the parents and sponsors, is to be administered apart from large public services of worship.**
- If Baptism is administered apart from the principal service, a small group of persons may be invited to represent the congregation.
- Those preparing for the rite are to wear masks at all times and wash hands with soap and water, or apply hand sanitizer immediately before the preparation.
- The font and any vessels to hold water and chrism are to be cleansed and disinfected immediately prior to the liturgy.
- A vessel, such as a small ladle, shell or bowl for pouring water over the baptismal candidate, is to be available.
- Adequate space for physical distancing between households is necessary. Multiple baptisms are discouraged during the pandemic.
- If more than one person is to be baptized, the celebrant and assisting ministers are to wash their hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer immediately before and after each baptism.

Instructions for the Baptism

- Participants are to maintain six feet of physical distancing between households throughout the rite.
- All participants except those under age two (and, at the discretion of parent or guardian, those under age five) are to wear masks throughout the rite.
- A parent or caregiver is to hold an infant candidate at all times during the rite.
- During the Presentation and Examination of the Candidate, the Baptismal Covenant and the Prayers for the Candidate, the celebrant and assisting ministers are to stand at least six feet apart from others and speak at a low volume to reduce aerosols.
- All who speak, including sponsors and the congregation, are to speak in a low voice throughout the rite to minimize aerosols.
- At the Blessing of the Water, an assisting minister may pour water into the font.
- The celebrant is not to touch the water during the Blessing.
- At the time of the baptism, water is poured over the head of the candidate using a bowl, shell or ladle. If more than one baptism is to take place, a separate basin should be used to catch the excess water.
- If an infant or young child is to be baptized, a parent or caregiver holds the child during the baptism.
- The celebrant and any assisting baptismal ministers are to wear a mask throughout the baptism and avoid breathing directly on the candidate or sponsors.
- At the laying-on-of-hands and anointing with chrism, the person performing the anointing is to touch the forehead of the candidate only briefly. If multiple persons are to receive the laying-on-of-hands and anointing, hand sanitizer is to be used between each laying-on-of-hands and before touching the chrism again.
- Those gathered welcome the newly baptized in a low voice but may offer vigorous applause or other gestures of welcome that do not require touch.

We are grateful for the wisdom of many in the preparation of this document:

For other dioceses and ecumenical partners who have issued guidelines for the distribution of Holy Communion, pastoral visits and the administration of Holy Baptism, in particular The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship and Sacraments;

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