



The Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan
131 East Ridge Street
Marquette, Michigan 49855

May 2, 2020

A letter to congregational leaders, including Vestries and Ministry Support Teams

Dear Friends:

The three bishops of the Episcopal Dioceses of Michigan have been in consultation with one another, healthcare professionals, and have followed CDC and state guidelines. The product of this is a document called a "Plan for Re-Entry for Great Lakes Episcopalians." It was important that I worked with my colleagues on this matter as there is lots of wisdom out of there and Michiganders have much in common.

While the above is true, we Upper Peninsula Episcopalians have a context unique to living 'above the bridge.' Our rural setting is both a benefit to us and at times a hindrance when it comes to accessing some resources. Because of this we in the UP may see the affects of COVID-19 later than the more populated areas in Lower Michigan. We will notice changes when more people head north for their summer homes and tourism starts coming back. It is this sort of thing that makes the timing of our re-entry into our church buildings a bit different than the other Michigan dioceses.

The re-entry plan lays out the phases (or steps) to equipping our churches for the coming months. These are: Phase I: Hiatus; Phase II: Re-entry; Phase III: Deeper Participation.

Currently we are in Phase I: Hiatus. We will continue in this phase at least until the stay at home orders are lifted and only when we have determined that churches can offer the required safety to begin meeting in person again. In the meantime, you will be hearing from diocesan staff who will arrange a time to go over the re-entry documents with your vestry and ministry support team. There is a lot of information to be shared and we want to be sure everyone is informed and oriented to what it will take for re-entry. We know every congregation is different with different needs. The purpose of these meetings is not to pressure any congregation to move faster than they are comfortable, but to support you in this process.

The Phase 1 Hiatus guidelines indicate what we are already doing:

Building use:

Minimal building drop-in to maintain essential operations (deposits, mail processing, etc.) ensuring there is only one person in the building at a time and common surfaces, including door knobs, counter tops, and office electronics, must be disinfected before and after use.

Worship & Formation:

In-person worship continues to be prohibited and it is recommended that each congregation find means of gathering using online tools together, or with other groups and congregations. There are many offerings available, including from diocesan staff. Let us know if you need more information

on these. We advise identifying a method by which your leadership will continue to engage your non-online parishioners, whether by phone, training and assistance to get access online, or some other means.

Required Guidelines for Worship:

- Live streaming from inside a church building is prohibited unless authorized by the bishop
- “Drive-thru” Eucharist is prohibited
- “Virtual communion” in which a minister “blesses” bread and wine through a phone or online connection is prohibited.
- Graveside funerals of ten people or fewer are permitted, while following physical distancing and mask guidelines
- Outdoor weddings of five people or fewer are permitted, while following physical distancing and mask guidelines
- Baptisms are permitted on an emergency only basis

We advise that all pastoral care be conducted virtually, as you are able.

Outreach (i.e. food pantries):

- Requirements for group size, physical distancing, sanitation, and use of masks must be followed.
- Distribution ministries must limit volunteer time spent inside the building. Distributions may only take place outside or on a curb-side basis.
- There must be no preparation of food in the building unless authorized by the bishop.

As always, if you have questions about what is or is not permissible, please ask. Feel free to contact any one of us for more information. Rayford Ray – rayfordray@upepiscopal.org; 906-360-1091; Jane Cisluycis – jane@upepiscopal.org; 906-360-0725; Lydia Bucklin – 906-458-3115

Blessings,

Rayford J. Ray
Bishop