

Journeying by Stages

The Stages of Gathering for Worship in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

*“From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed
by stages, as the LORD commanded.” Exodus 17:1*



Aaron Burden on Unsplash

This is a living document, and it will be updated as new information is available. Please check the date to ensure that you are using the latest version.

Stage One: The Crisis

“The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them.” Exodus 14: 19



As in the Exodus when the Israelites waited before the Red Sea with the Egyptian army behind them and God’s Presence keeping them safe, we must wait in place, worshiping God and serving others as we are able, trusting that God will create a way forward.

Rhode Island, Phase I:

- Emergency measures in place in response to public health crisis
- COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are increasing
- Only essential businesses are open and essential personnel working in-person
- If you are allowed to work from home, you must work from home
- Worship is led online

• Churches hold virtual worship, with services recorded or live-streamed. If there are potential hotspots for an outbreak the clergy may lead worship in churches only if they live on the grounds or nearby, otherwise worship is led from home. In-person participants in the liturgy are limited to the clergy and immediate family members or those within a restricted small circle of five people. Those who are sick, over 65, or have underlying health conditions which increase risk should stay home. The Bishop has chosen to fast from celebrating or receiving the Holy Eucharist in solidarity with

those who cannot receive. Clergy may celebrate and receive the Holy Eucharist as may be appropriate in their unique context. Holy Communion may be distributed as wafers only.

- Bible study, coffee hours, community events, Christian formation, social gatherings, and meetings are held online and by telephone.
- Outreach ministries and support groups are offered online where possible. Feeding ministries and similar essential services are organized in a pick-up, drive-through or delivery format to meet the needs of the vulnerable while protecting both guests and church members from possible spread of the virus. Physical distancing of six feet or more, thorough hand washing and/or hand sanitizing, masks worn over the nose and mouth, and disinfecting of high touch areas are all required to limit possible transmission of the virus. Episcopal Charities offers a Charities NOW campaign to support local ministries providing front line services to those in need.
- Pastoral care is offered online, by telephone, emails, notes and cards.
- End of life care may be offered via video call, by telephone, or in-person if appropriate safety protocols can be observed and a clergy person is willing and able to provide such care. Guidelines vary among hospitals, hospices, and home care providers and should be checked prior to arrival; nursing homes, assisted living, and congregate care centers are closed to clergy. Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be provided; physical distancing of six feet or more observed; and strict hygiene engaged, allowing for minimal touch of common surfaces, and including hand washing and disinfecting of areas touched. Meeting outdoors or the circulation of fresh air is encouraged when possible to minimize airborne exposure to the virus.
- Funerals may be held with a limit of ten people, observing Rhode Island Department of Health guidelines. Graveside services are recommended due to fresh air. Physical distancing of six feet or more among those attending, masks that cover the nose and mouth, and hand washing or sanitizing are required. Cremation and memorial services are encouraged when possible so that services may be delayed until gathering is safer. No gathering is held following the service. Clergy are advised to consult the Department of Health guidelines regarding out-of-state guests and the requirements for quarantine before attending a funeral.

Stage Two: The Path Forward Begins to Emerge

“The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.” Exodus 14:21



Like the Israelites, we watch and wait in faith, doing as we are asked, and ready to move forward when God shows us the time is right.

Rhode Island, Phase II

- Emergency measures are lifted in incremental steps
- Hospital capacity, new hospitalizations, rate of spread, and hospitalizations are decreasing; increases may lead to resumed restrictions
- Specific non-essential businesses are reopening with strict limitations
- All those who can work from home should work from home
- Social gatherings increase to 15 people
- Worship continues online

• Worship continues online; the number of participants may increase to 10. Although the Governor is allowing in-person worship to resume with a maximum of 25% capacity as of May 30, we are strongly encouraged to wait until a safer pathway is clear. The Bishop, as Rector of mission churches, is instructing them to wait as we monitor the results from faith communities who resume public worship on May 30. Rectors and Vestries are also advised to wait. While we wait, we continue to pray, serve, and plan for our next steps in response to the information we receive. The

Journeying by Stages preparation checklist is recommended as a resource in planning how worship can resume in your unique context.

- Churches hosting other worshipping communities in their buildings are to be in conversation with those groups and obtain, in writing, their plan for observing all Rhode Island Health Department requirements pertaining to gathering for public worship, especially the limitation of attendance to a maximum of 25% of building capacity, and including the wearing of masks, physical distancing, and disinfecting of common spaces. The Journeying by Stages preparation checklist may be shared with guest worshipping communities as a resource. Guest worshipping communities are to be encouraged to hold services outside if possible, and to open windows and increase the circulation of fresh air if meeting indoors.
- Bible study, coffee hours, community events, Christian formation, social gatherings, and meetings continue online and by telephone.
- Outreach ministries continue as in Stage One.
- Pastoral care and end of life care continue as in Stage One. End of life rites may be held with 10 or fewer guests, all following PPE, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and disinfecting guidelines.
- Funerals are limited to 15 or fewer guests. Graveside services are preferred due to fresh air. Physical distancing of six feet or more among those attending, masks that cover the nose and mouth, and hand washing or sanitizing are required. Additional staff or officiants, including pall bearers, clergy, funeral director, honor guards, bag piper, and bugler are not included in the capacity limit and must remain 12 feet away and wear masks. Instrumentalists may remove masks while playing. Cremation and memorial services are encouraged when possible so that services may be delayed until gathering is safer. No gathering is held following the service. For services held in funeral homes please follow the guidance of the Rhode Island Department of Health. <https://health.ri.gov/publications/guidance/Guidance-for-Funeral-Homes.pdf>.
- Church offices are considered by the state to be a non-essential business. All employees who can work from home should continue to do so. Church offices must complete a COVID-19 Control Plan and meet all required physical distancing, mask wearing, hand sanitizing, and disinfecting protocols. Given emerging information about the airborne risk of infection, windows should be open if possible; employees

should be spaced at maximum physical distance, but no less than six feet apart; and time in the building should be minimal, as prolonged exposure to recirculated air increases the possibility of infection. The detailed Journeying by Stages Preparation Checklist should be consulted and customized for your church.

- Church run businesses are considered non-essential by the state and may open according to Rhode Island Health Department guidelines after completing a COVID-19 Control Plan and meeting all required physical distancing, mask wearing, hand sanitizing, and disinfecting protocols. Working groups specific to thrift shops, preschools, and other ministries will be formed to create guidelines to be reviewed by the Bishop. The detailed Journeying by Stages Preparation Checklist should be consulted and customized for your church business.
- Businesses operating on church property may open according to Rhode Island Health Department guidelines for their specific type of business after completing a COVID-19 Control Plan and meeting all required physical distances, mask wearing, hand sanitizing, and disinfecting protocols. Vestries and Bishop's Committees should request a copy of the Control Plan for each business and a letter of commitment to follow state guidelines.

Stage Three: Walking Between the Waters

“The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” Exodus 14:22



We begin to move forward, as the Israelites did, following a new pathway.

Rhode Island, Phase III

- Emergency measures continue to lift in incremental steps
- Hospital capacity, new hospitalizations, rate of spread, and hospitalizations are decreasing; increases may lead to resumed restrictions
- Non-essential businesses continue to reopen with limitations
- More people return to work in-person with strict guidelines and capacity limits, while many continue to work from home
- Social gatherings increase to 50 people
- In-person public worship may begin with strict guidance
- Worship continues online

· Churches may begin to gather in-person for worship. Outdoor services are recommended where possible, as fresh air minimizes the spread of airborne transmission of the virus. Capacity is limited to one person per every 150 square foot of space. Masks are required, along with all standard physical distancing, hygiene, and disinfecting requirements.

· Drive-in and drive-through services are allowed, provided attendees remain in their vehicles and do not interact physically with anyone other than clergy. If necessary, people may leave their vehicles to use the restroom. Each vehicle should

contain only members of a single household. Cars must park at least six feet apart, or approximately every other parking space.

- Indoor worship may be held with a maximum of 25% capacity. Windows should be open where possible and fresh air circulated. Masks must be worn, physical distancing of a minimum of six feet between family groupings must be observed, hand washing and hand sanitizing must be frequent and thorough, cleaning and disinfecting of common surfaces is required. The Journeying by Stages Preparation Checklist is recommended as a resource in planning how worship can resume in your unique context. A plan must be developed prior to the first public worship service offered, and reviewed by the Bishop.

- Until further scientific and medical information is available, there should be no congregational singing, as the force of projecting one's voice carries the virus further than normal speech and may endanger others. Clergy, readers, and soloists should be positioned at a significant distance from others not in their own family and should remain masked to limit potential spread by projection of the voice. Please consult the Journeying by Stages Checklist for details to consider.

- Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was asked if he thinks Communion can be distributed safely. He said "No."* Therefore we advise that alternative forms of worship be offered, and that those who choose to celebrate the Holy Eucharist do so with due caution and deliberation. Holy Communion may be distributed as the host only. The Journeying by Stages Checklist offers possibilities to consider for celebrating and distributing the Holy Eucharist.

- For those churches who offer either outdoor or indoor worship, thought must be given to who will be allowed to attend each service if the seating capacity allowed is lower than the number of worshipers expected, and the plan communicated to possible attendees prior to the service.

- As churches plan to regather for in-person worship, we recommend using the template A Covenant for Regathering, based in the baptismal covenant used in the Episcopal Church, to create a shared commitment within your faith community to reopen safely for worship.

August 11, 2020

- We also recommend that churches notify those who choose to attend in-person worship that by doing so they assume the risk of possible exposure to the Coronavirus.
- Worship continues online, allowing for participation for those who cannot attend in-person and those who have come to participate through an expanded circle of virtual inclusion.

[*https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/05/27/dr-anthony-fauci-catholic-churches-masks-communion-covid-coronavirus](https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/05/27/dr-anthony-fauci-catholic-churches-masks-communion-covid-coronavirus)

Stage Four: Meeting God In Unexpected Places and Ways

“Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting... When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses.” Exodus 33: 7, 9



Like the Israelites, we will continue our reopening journey by meeting God where we are, and by following where God leads, when God leads.

The State of Rhode Island has left Phase Four of the Reopening RI plan open, saying simply: “Along the way, we’ll innovate as we challenge ourselves to find new and better ways of operating and living.”

We intend to do likewise.

While praying, imagining, and planning for what might come next, we are choosing to remain open to where God might lead us and how we should respond when that time comes.

In the meantime, as we journey through the wilderness together, we hope to both keep what we have learned from this time of adapting and welcoming others, and to embrace the Holy Spirit, whose gift to us on Pentecost reminds us that God is willing to work in and through us in new and surprising ways.



Journeying by Stages Checklist for In-Person Worship in the Diocese of Rhode Island in an age of COVID-19, August 2020

| | Person Responsible | Done |
|---|--------------------|------|
| Preparing the worship site or facility | | |
| Clean and disinfect high-touch/shared surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, faucets and taps, elevator buttons, railings. | | |
| Designate separate entrance and exit with signage. | | |
| Place hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol content at the entrance and exit and throughout the facility. If Holy Communion will be celebrated, have hand sanitizer available for worshipers as they prepare to receive. | | |
| Put up posters educating worshipers about COVID-19 and distancing protocols. | | |
| Determine whether you are able to worship outside as a first choice. If not, is your usual worship space the best place for worship at this time? Perhaps you have a fellowship hall that is larger and more suitable just now. | | |
| If indoors, clearly indicate the route worshipers are to use from the entry to the worship space and clearly indicate proper physical distancing, perhaps with markers on the floor. | | |
| Close common areas. | | |
| Close rooms that will not be in use. | | |
| Remove all shared items such as brochures and hymnals, and any soft surfaces such as pew cushions, children's activity bags and stuffed animals. | | |
| To indicate proper physical distancing, rearrange chairs or rope off pews accordingly. | | |
| Ensure that worship leaders will have appropriate physical distance of at least 6 feet from each other and will each have their own microphones (if using). | | |
| Place floor indicators or other markers to show physical distance for those who are waiting to receive Holy Communion. | | |
| Consider if or how your bathrooms will be open to worshippers and how they will be sanitized between uses. | | |
| Preparing Worshipers | | |
| Communicate that staff, volunteers and worshipers who are ill or who have been exposed to COVID-19 must stay home. | | |
| Communicate that those with underlying medical conditions and those over 65 years old are at a higher risk of experiencing worse symptoms than others if they contract the virus. | | |

| | Person Responsible | Done |
|--|--------------------|------|
| Communicate the risks of entering the church, and that the church cannot guarantee the safety of those who enter. Inform worshippers and others that by entering the church they are assuming those risks. Communicate changes to worship space. | | |
| Communicate that worshipers <i>are asked to keep a physical distance at all times</i> , practice good hand hygiene, and sneeze or cough into their elbows. It is required that worshipers over the age of 2 wear face masks when in the church. | | |
| Communicate changes to the worship service in advance (e.g., no congregational singing, how reception of Holy Communion will take place, no gathering or coffee hour before or after service). | | |
| Preparing to Worship | | |
| At the time of this writing, the number of people allowed in the worship space is 25% of total capacity. There must be a plan in place to determine how the church will accommodate those who wish to worship in-person. | | |
| A plan is in place to continue to include in worship those who will not attend in-person worship. | | |
| A list is kept of worshipers, staff, and volunteers at all services in case someone later tests positive for COVID-19 and their movements must be traced. This list will be kept for two weeks before it will be destroyed or deleted. | | |
| Worship is planned in accordance with the current RI Public Health guidelines. | | |
| Congregants are reminded to clean their hands on entry and exit. | | |
| A plan is in place to help worshipers participate in the service. A single-use bulletin is left on chairs or pews AND/OR the bulletin is projected on a screen or available online. | | |
| *Clergy and congregation should remain masked when not receiving communion. No exception for preaching or speaking/reading. This recommendation is in response to the latest scientific evidence. <i>Changed as of 8/11/20</i> | | |
| Children will remain with their parents, even if a children's time is offered. | | |
| The Peace is shared without physical contact. | | |
| The offering plate is neither circulated nor presented at the altar. There is a plan to receive gifts safely. Encourage worshipers to make contributions through electronic means. | | |
| If the Eucharist is celebrated, a plan is in place to offer the Sacrament as wafers only, as safely as possible. | | |
| There is a plan to clean and disinfect the worship space between services. | | |

| Holy Communion | | |
|--|--------------------|------|
| | Person Responsible | Done |
| Altar Guild members and others who prepare elements and vessels for Holy Communion must wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before handling vessels and linens. | | |
| Priests and assistants wash or sanitize their hands before blessing the elements and distributing Holy Communion. A covering should remain over the wafers while the priest is celebrating. | | |
| Priests and assistants must wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion. Communicants must also wear a mask and step at least 6 feet away from the servers or return to their pews before communicating themselves. | | |
| Worshippers are directed to servers in an organized fashion, leaving physical distance between family groups. | | |
| Communicants sanitize their hands as they proceed to the table. | | |
| It is recommended that to minimize close contact, the communicant pauses at a distance from the server, who says, "The Body of Christ," to which the response "Amen" is given. The server should take special care not to touch the communicant. If there is contact, the server should pause to sanitize hands before continuing. | | |
| Communion in one kind is recognized as a full experience of the Sacrament. Parishes shall offer wafers only. Note that wafers (whether regular or gluten free) require less handling than wafers and should be used for Communion. | | |
| Common cup and intinction are not permitted. | | |
| Worshippers are directed back to their seats in an organized fashion, leaving physical distance of 6 feet or more between family groups. | | |
| If holding a drive-in or drive-through service, the priest may approach the car window to distribute the wafers. | | |
| Priests and assistants wash or sanitize their hands after distribution. | | |
| Holy Baptism | | |
| The baptism may be held outdoors if possible. | | |
| The font, a cruet, or other vessel is sanitized and filled with clean water. | | |
| The person to be baptized, if an infant, remains in the arms of their family. | | |
| Family groups at the font or designated spot maintain physical distance. | | |
| The priest wears a mask. | | |
| Water is poured on the baptized with a shell, cruet, or similar vessel. | | |
| The baptized is anointed with oil on a cotton ball. | | |
| A member of the baptismal party lights the baptismal candle from the paschal candle as the words of presentation are said. | | |

| Weddings and Funerals | | |
|--|--------------------|------|
| | Person Responsible | Done |
| At the time of this writing, outdoor gatherings of up to 15 people practicing physical distancing are permissible. | | |
| Weddings and funerals held within the church building must follow the same guidelines as other worship services. | | |
| General | | |
| Staff and volunteers receive information and training about new processes following RI guidelines and the COVID-19 Control Plan for the church. | | |
| Staff and volunteers have access to masks and hand sanitizer. | | |
| Offering counters have access to gloves. | | |
| People are designated to clean and sanitize high traffic areas, including washrooms, between services. | | |
| Leaders remain aware of new RI Health Department guidelines. Be prepared to discontinue in-person worship if levels of infection rise. | | |
| Renters/Outside Groups | | |
| Congregations may permit outside groups to use the facility providing they follow all health guidelines regarding physical distancing, mask wearing, etc., and the congregation/rental groups have resources to handle the cleaning requirements between each use. Facility rentals should be suspended if groups cannot or will not adhere to gathering restrictions. | | |
| Renters must submit written details as to how they will meet health guidelines prior to their use of the facility. | | |
| Singing | | |
| No congregational singing is permitted. Recorded or streamed music may be played. Soloists and instrumentalists may provide music following recommendations for safe distancing and/or barriers. | | |
| Singing should be limited to a soloist/cantor or small group (4 or fewer). If multiple singers are present, they should be at least 14 feet apart from one another and other worship leaders, and from the congregation (when one is present). | | |
| Singers should use their own music stands and not share lecterns or pulpits or microphones with other worship leaders. | | |
| Singers should not sing from rear gallery lofts. | | |

| | Person Responsible | Done |
|--|--------------------|------|
| Following the grace period extended to houses of worship that ended May 24, recorded music from any source is subject to licensing restrictions when broadcast live, streamed/podcast, or posted. For information about licensing, visit www.OneLicense.net . Graphics are also subject to copyright restrictions. | | |
| Small Groups | | |
| Continue to offer and encourage participation in online groups to maintain ministry to the most vulnerable population and provide ongoing opportunity for those who still feel uncomfortable with in-person gatherings. | | |
| Establish and maintain the same principles as stated above for every small group gathering. | | |
| In-person meetings should be restricted to between five people and the current social gathering limit, and not exceed 25% of the Fire Marshal capacity. | | |
| Church Office Usage | | |
| Church offices must complete a COVID-19 Control plan. https://www.reopeningri.com/resource_pdfs/COVID-19-Control_Plan_Fillable_Template-Final-5.13.20.pdf | | |
| Churches with a small staff can re-assemble using social distancing and safety measures, such as masks and regular handwashing. | | |
| Churches with larger teams of staff should consider staggered work hours to limit the number of people in the building at one time. Also, office space should be sanitized and thoroughly cleaned daily. Shared office spaces must be thoroughly cleaned between shifts. | | |
| In-person meetings should be restricted to between five people and the current social gathering limit, and not exceed 25% of the Fire Marshal capacity. | | |

