PHASE I RETURN TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP AND MEETINGS

Based on the Governor’s document posted on Wednesday, April 22 please consider our congregations as restaurants: we feed people spiritually. The Governor says that restaurants can become operational on or after May 4th under strict physical distancing and reduced capacity protocols in accordance with State guidelines. **We will not have in-person worship on April 26th.**

I will give permission, on a case-by-case basis, for small churches in counties where there have no cases to begin in-person worship on May 3rd. This will be contingent on them being able to follow the appropriate guidelines below. The rest of us **MAY** try out in-person worship on May 9th with the same limitations. I will be in conversation with the larger churches to devise protocols for a stepped return to in-person worship. No church will be required to start in-person worship on May 9th. Each priest-in-charge will work with Bishop Marty to discern the best date to start.

As Bishop Andy Doyle warned his diocese: **“It is possible that, after regathering, a person may expose the congregation to the COVID-19 virus. If that happens, those gathered will be asked to return to a 14-day quarantine and church may have to use virtual worship only during that period.”** Always keep this in mind.

While we hoped that we could gather for Easter-like services after the outbreak, this will not be possible at this time. Use the next days until May 9th to:

* inform the congregation of the rules for in-person worship
* remind those who are at-risk that they should continue to shelter-in-place until Phase III (that includes clergy!)
* make sure your facilities are sanitized, a CDC resource: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html
* develop a sanitizing protocol, with people identified for the work, to clean commonly contaminated surfaces before and after worship
* make sure all who come to worship for this phase
  + wear masks that cover the mouth and nose while on church property (no Eucharist taken while in sanctuary to avoid handling the mask)
  + passing of the peace without contact or losing physical distancing outside of a family unit
  + family units and individuals remain 6-10 ft from other family units and individuals while on church property
* no choirs to be gathered, but they may disperse throughout the congregation: singing must be done with masks on.
* Identify where worship will be done to maintain proper physical distance.

Relevant Biblical passages for caution during a phased return to in-person worship (with the cautionary act of cherry-picking passages):

**Matthew 22:37-40**

Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ **38**This is the greatest and first commandment. **39**And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ **40**On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

**Matthew 25:40**

And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3A40&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24046a)] you did it to me.’

**Galatians 1:10**

Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=galatians+1%3A10&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29051a)] of Christ.

**Galatians 5:13-14**

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=galatians+5%3A13-14&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29159a)] only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=galatians+5%3A13-14&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29159b)] but through love become slaves to one another. **14**For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

**Romans 14:13-15**

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+14%3A13-15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28279a)] **14**I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. **15**If your brother or sister[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+14%3A13-15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28281b)] is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.

**Philippians 2:1-4**

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others.