

PROTOCOLS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Tacoma, WA

In 2020, the world became aware of the novel corona virus [SARS-CoV-2] and we now know, all too well, its deleterious effects on human life and health. Over 200,000 people in the USA and over half a million people worldwide have died from the illness caused by this virus. Reliable, objective scientific research and analysis have shown that COVID-19 is more contagious than the influenza virus and that more people die from COVID-19 illness than from seasonal influenza, especially individuals who are more vulnerable to the virus. Such people include:

People who are 65 years old and older

People who already have compromised immune systems

People who are diabetic

People who are obese

People who have asthma and/or heart disease

We respect the freedom of individuals to make their own decisions about when, or if, they wish to resume worshipping in person, in accordance with their own health and perception of risk. We now know that people of every age, including infants, children and young adults, are susceptible to suffering the direst consequences of COVID-19. None of us is safe from the effects of this virus. As followers of the risen Christ, we are charged with loving God with our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths, and loving our neighbors as ourselves; indeed, the way we love God, Jesus tells us, is by loving our neighbors. To that end, in conjunction with the Safe Start guidelines provided by the State of Washington, and in accordance with the Guide to Gathering in Person document of the Diocese of Olympia, All Saints' Episcopal Church will adopt the following protocols to ensure we are loving our neighbors.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Prior to worshipping again in the church building:

The church will undergo a thorough cleaning following CDC guidelines.

All hymnals will be removed from pew backs and stored in one of the portable buildings. All copies of the Book of Common Prayer will be sanitized; all persons attending services will be asked to use only one copy, then take it home in order to bring it for their use when attending services on all subsequent Sundays.

All newcomer forms, pens, etc. will be removed from the nave and narthex, and stored in one of the portable buildings. [All portable buildings will be locked and off-limits to entry during Phases 2 and 3 of the Safe Start operation.] [Members of the congregation will be asked to bring their own pens to services.]

High-contact areas will be thoroughly sanitized before, in between, and after services at the church, including:

Pew backs & sides

Door handles

Light switches

Thermostats

Electronic equipment e.g. microphones

Pulpit

Altar hard furnishings

Seating areas will be clearly delineated to ensure a minimum of six feet distance between individuals and households. Front seats will be delineated at least 6 feet away from the lectern and pulpit, since worship leaders may sometimes speak in louder voices. All available seating for the congregation will provide at least 6 feet intervals in all directions between co-sheltering households.

Two different doors [clearly posted] will be used, one for entering and one for departing the church building. The doors will be propped open by the first congregation member to arrive, so as to promote air circulation and limit repeated contact with members' hands in opening and closing them.

Signs will be posted inside and outside the church to remind worshipers and guests:

To maintain physical distancing

To wear face coverings

Locations of entrances and exits

About COVID-19 symptoms

How to wash and disinfect the hands

To have no more than one person in a restroom at any given time.

Markers will be placed on the ground outside in front of the doors at 6-foot intervals. Markers will also be placed in indoor traffic areas, including paths to the restrooms.

The baptismal font will be removed from the sanctuary and will remain set aside and empty of water until it is safe to fill it again.

Extraneous chairs will be removed from the dais.

Hand Sanitizer, hand tissues, and trash receptacles will be readily available in the pews or in the aisles.

Capacity will be in compliance with Washington State guideline [see below under "**worship service**"] and posted at entrances to buildings.

Due to the needs of many older members of the congregation, the restrooms in the church will remain available for use. There will be disinfectant (either spray or wipes) on hand in the restroom. Posters instructing how to wash the hands will be posted in both rest rooms. A sign stating that only one member may be in a rest room at any given time will be posted on each rest room door.

The parish hall will remain closed for fellowship until Pierce County enters Phase 4. [But members of the congregation may talk outside on the lawn after services, provided they wear facial coverings and maintain social distancing.]

WORSHIP SERVICES

In accordance with Washington State guidelines, during Phase 2 All Saints' may conduct outdoor services with up to 100 persons or indoor services with persons up to 25% of building capacity. For the All Saints' congregation, this would mean 27 or 28 persons. In a survey of preferences by members of the congregation, about half of those responding said that they are unwilling to return to in-person services until Pierce County enters Phase 4 or a COVID vaccine becomes available. If this is the case, the number of persons attending in-person services during Phase 2 or 3 would never exceed 27. We will begin in-person services with only one service each Sunday. [A majority of members responding to a telephone survey preferred services at 10:00 A.M., or were willing to attend at 10:00 A.M. if that was not their first choice.] Before in-person services resume, selected member volunteers will be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting the church building and for screening members arriving to attend services.

ENTERING THE BUILDING

Every person arriving to attend a service must fill out and sign a consent document [**EVENT DISCLOSURE AND SCREENING FORM** – see enclosed sample]. Before the first in-person service, all members of the congregation will be warned to bring their own pens and masks, but disposable masks will be available for those who forgot to bring them. To prevent congestion and loss of social distancing in the Narthex while persons are filling out their forms, they may take the forms to their pews, fill them out [with their own pens] and return them to an Usher in the Narthex when leaving at the end of the service. The Usher will then provide each person a blank form to fill out at home during the coming week and then bring it to the next service. This form will be retained at the church for 21 days after the service, and then destroyed if no person who attended is reported to have tested positive for COVID. In the event of a case of COVID-19 in the congregation is reported, the Priest, or in his/her absence the Senior Warden, will use these forms to know who was in attendance that day, then call them to inform them of their potential exposure and advise them to seek testing or practice self-quarantining. This will be done without communicating the name(s) of whoever tested positive. The Priest and/or the Senior Warden will also notify the local health department.

Specially trained ushers will use infrared thermometers to check every person arriving to attend services. Anyone with a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit [38.0 degrees Celsius] or above will be instructed to return home and consult their health care provider. The ushers will also ask every person arriving whether they have any COVID-related symptoms [see next sentence]. Any visitor reporting 1 or more of the following symptoms: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; or 2 or more of the following symptoms: fever, chills/sweating, headache, muscle aches, sore throat or altered sense of smell or taste will be instructed to go home and consult their health care provider.

Ushers will provide copies of the bulletin to each household, and ask them to take these home and dispose of them after the service.

All persons attending services, whether indoor or outdoor, must wear face masks, covering both the nose and the mouth. Anyone arriving without a mask will be provided one. Those persons refusing to

wear a mask correctly will not be allowed to enter the building and will be asked to leave the premises. If anyone enters the church after services have begun without wearing a mask and who refuses to put one on when offered one, all services must stop and everyone attending must leave. A written record of the incident, with names of all persons present, will be generated and maintained at the church for at least 21 days afterward. The only persons exempt from wearing a mask are children under 2 years old and persons producing a written note from their health care provider stating that wearing a mask would be injurious to their health.

Vinyl gloves will be offered to all persons entering the church. Sanitizers and tissues will be available in all pews. Trash containers for used tissues will be available along the aisles. Social distancing (at least 6 feet apart) will be observed as people queue to enter the building. The sidewalk will be marked to assist in the distancing; likewise, people will not linger in the aisles, but do their best to get to their seats as quickly as possible.

During the Service

Before the onset of the COVID pandemic, there was no passing of the collection plate during services at All Saints'. Members of the congregation routinely placed their contributions in a plate set beside a front pew before the service, or sent their contributions via mail or other means. This custom can be continued during the time of COVID.

During the service, the ushers will monitor the behavior of the congregation and gently remind members to wear their masks properly [including keeping the nose covered], keep proper distancing and keep their voices low throughout the service. Instrumental (piano) music may be allowed, but there will be no singing or chanting until after Pierce County enters Phase 4.

The only time a person may remove their mask is if they are consuming communion. All readers, including the celebrant/preacher, must keep their masks on at all times, even while speaking or reading aloud, unless they can be at least 15 feet from the nearest person and are speaking for less than 15 minutes. The celebrant will give the announcements. Persons reading a Lesson, leading the Prayers of the People, preaching or praying in the context of presiding must not shout, but speak in a low tone of voice into the microphone. The microphone must be wiped with disinfectant after each speaker.

At the Peace, people will stay in their pews. There will be no touching, hugging, handshaking at the Peace. The presider/celebrant from an appropriate distance will speak the words of peace to the congregation ["The Peace of the Lord be always with you"] accompanied by the gesture of extending both arms. In response, the congregation will say [NOT shout] the response ["And with thy spirit" or "And also with you"]. When the congregation is invited to exchange the Peace among themselves, they will do so without speaking or leaving their seats, using one of the following gestures:

A gentle nod, or even a deep, reverent bow toward one another.

A simple wave to one another.

Crossing arms over the chest, as a symbol of an embrace

Placing the right hand over the heart and making a slight bow to the person.

Holy Communion

The Celebrant and the Eucharistic Minister will wear face coverings throughout the rite.

In Phase 2 and 3 there will be no procession. The Celebrant/Presider and Acolyte will take their places at the front prior to the beginning of the service.

During Phase 2 and 3, the Bishop forbids the use of the Common Cup. In Phase 2, we will not use the wafers or the cup, and instead will have a “Spiritual Communion.” This is a personal devotional that anyone can pray at any time to express their desire to receive Holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances prevent them from doing so. The Celebrant invites the following prayer to be said by all: “My Jesus, I believe that You are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love You above all things, and long for You in my soul. Since I cannot receive You in the Sacrament of Your Body and Blood, come spiritually into my heart. Cleanse and strengthen me with Your grace, Lord Jesus, and let me never be separated from You. May I live in You, and You in me, in this life and in the life to come. *Amen.*”

The wafer can be reintroduced in Phase 3. Altar Guild persons and any others in the chain must carefully sanitize all surfaces, wash and sanitize hands, wear masks, etc. All linens, including the pall should be cleaned thoroughly after each use, and definitely before each use. The Presider alone will set the table. No one else’s hands will be involved in this procedure, including bringing items from the credence table. The Presider will simply go to retrieve all items as needed. The Presider will vigorously wash and sanitize the hands before the service and multiple times throughout the service, especially before setting the table and beginning the consecration prayer. In setting the table, the Preside must use the pall to cover all wafers, and expose only the priest host, in order to prevent any droplets from falling on them. The Priest host will be touched and consumed only by the Presider. For distribution, the Presider will either consume the priest host before distribution or set it aside to consume after all others have received. No one else will stand near the Presider at the altar. The wafers will then be placed at least 6 inches apart in a line around the side and front of the altar. The Presider will make every effort not to touch the linen while doing this. If some members of the congregation have trouble ascending the steps to the altar, another table can be placed at floor level. After the Presider has placed the first wafers on the table, the ushers can begin to allow the congregants to come forward one at a time, all the while maintaining social distancing. Before approaching the altar EVERY PERSON must sanitize the hands and allow them to dry before going forward. Every person will take one wafer and NOT CONSUME IT until after returning to their seat. They may then remove their mask and consume the wafer. They should use sanitizer available in each pew to sanitize the hands after consuming the wafer. [The Bishop highly DISCOURAGES the use of real bread during this time. If a church choose to do so, the bread must be placed in small paper cups or similar containers.] Again, no wine will be offered to anyone besides the Presider until at least Phase 4.

Members of the congregation must take care when saying the liturgical responses or unison prayers to avoid creating aerosols; this means they must speak in a normal or low tone of voice, not loudly, even when saying the Great *Amen*. At the distribution of the wafers in Phase 3, the celebrant will place the wafer in the hand of each communicant, taking great care not to touch the hand of the communicant. If contact is made accidentally, the celebrant must immediately disinfect his/her hands with the sanitizer before moving on to the next communicant. At the altar rail, social distancing must still be maintained. The kneeling pads will be marked at 6 feet intervals. While communicants wait to approach the altar rail,

they should maintain proper 6-foot intervals from each other. [Markers will be placed on the floor and the ushers will assist with this requirement.] They must use one of the side aisles to return to their seats.

The celebrant will clear the altar before the Post Communion Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Blessing.

Departure

After the Priest offers the Benediction, members of the congregation will exit the church, beginning with the back pews, while maintaining proper social distancing. There will be no handshaking or long conversations during this maneuver. After all have exited, the Priest will go immediately to the Vesting Room, and then go outside. Some conversations among members may occur outside, provided that masks are still worn and social distancing is preserved. The church and rest rooms, especially high surfaces must be thoroughly cleaned after and before each service. [See pages 1 and 2.]

OUTSIDE SERVICES

All preventative protocols, as listed above, will remain in place for outside services as well including:
Release forms

Temperature checks

Mandatory use of face masks

Social distancing of at least 6 feet

Hand sanitizer

Additionally, people will be asked to bring their own chairs and prayer books as needed.

MEETINGS

Because the Bishop's Committee consists of only 8 members, including the Clerk and Treasurer, it is possible to hold meetings in the Parish Hall, provided that masks are consistently worn, temperature checks are done and 6-foot intervals are maintained. After consulting the Priest or the Senior Warden, other groups may also hold meetings if they desire, provided the same protocols are observed.

Congregation members may meet via Zoom for Morning Prayer if they choose.