



# The Convocation of **Episcopal** Churches in Europe

*The Episcopal Church in The Anglican Communion*

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THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY

23 Avenue George V + 75008 Paris + France

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## Regathering the Church Prayerfully and Intentionally

Our time of stringent isolation is coming to an end, and soon the various national jurisdictions in which the Convocation operates will be relaxing prohibitions on social gatherings and, specifically, worship in our churches.

The bishop and the Council of Advice are eager to support all of our congregations as they move toward what will be, for all of us, not a return to the old “normal,” but the development of a new normal.

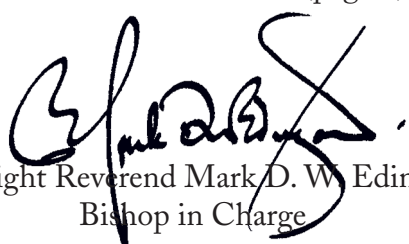
It will continue to be the case that—for reasons of restrictions imposed by civil authorities or practices commended by our call to care for each other—our practices in the future will look different from those in the past.

It is also the case that many of our members will remain in populations at high risk for severe outcomes from Covid-19, and will, as a result, wish to remain engaged with us through virtual connections.

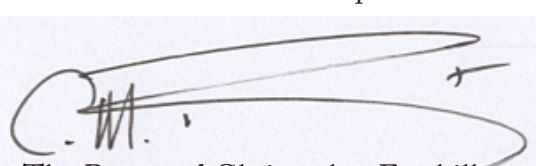
Finally, we know that the restrictions on gatherings for worship and fellowship will not take place all of a piece, but in a series of phased relaxation of restrictions. This means that every congregation needs to approach thoughtfully and prayerfully how it will adjust its operations in line with each next phase of restrictions.

For the foreseeable future, the *certainty* with which we prefer to do the work of God’s faithful people has been taken away from us, to be replaced by uncertainty, volatility, and a very real degree of danger. In the absence of this certainty, we must have *clarity* about the actions we take—and the reasons for which we take them. With all this in mind, the bishop and Council of Advice request that every congregation in the Convocation prepare and submit to the bishop’s office **a plan for Reopening and Regathering the Church**. Parish clergy and wardens should work together in the development of this plan, answering the questions set forth in the questionnaire on page 5. **No congregation may reopen until this plan has been submitted to and approved by the bishop.**

Plans for regathering the church should also account for the Bishop’s Pastoral Directive for the Worship and Work of the Church (page 2). This directive will be revised as developments warrant.



The Right Reverend Mark D. W. Edington  
Bishop in Charge



The Reverend Christopher Easthill  
President of the Council of Advice

## **Bishop's Pastoral Directive for Worship and Work of the Church**

April 23, 2020

The isolation and confinement imposed by the necessity of “lockdowns” to contend with the public health crisis of Covid-19 have changed our church. In some ways, these weeks have given us a keener appreciation for the value of our practices of gathering and worship, and have brought us to see that virtual gatherings cannot convey the power or achieve the fellowship of a gathering of people in the same time and space. In other ways, this extended Lenten discipline of doing without the worship life of the church has brought about the expression of creativity and new forms of community, many of which hold the potential help us better and more joyfully to respond to God’s call in mission and service in a world we already knew was greatly changed.

These realities point toward the need, for the period in which the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic remains a potential among us, to shape our work and worship along new lines. We cannot simply return to former ways; we must adapt them in ways responsive to the enduring danger of a highly communicable virus, while at the same time honoring and maintaining the very real advances we have made in gathering new communities of worship and fellowship using new tools and new platforms.

Under the canons of our church, bishops have the role of assuring that clergy and congregations offer ministry “in accordance with the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church.” Beyond this, bishops are given the duty “to deliver, from time to time, a Charge to the Clergy of the [Convocation] and a Pastoral Letter to the people of the [Convocation] on points of doctrine, discipline, or worship.” At the same time, our canons clearly state that “The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish.”

This message therefore comes as an expression of my responsibility to offer teaching; but its force is limited to the role that bishops have, and it acknowledges the responsibility clergy have for the worship of their communities. Bishops can recommend, or express a prayerful expectation, for how congregations will adapt their practices and worship to the contextualized realities within which they answer God’s call, including the circumstance of a highly communicable virus; but I do not presume to give those recommendations force beyond what the canons allow.

Accordingly, and until further notice, I ask that the clergy and lay leadership of the congregations of the Convocation observe the following guidelines:

### *I. Preparing and Sharing Worship*

- All gatherings for worship in the church must follow the guidelines for social gatherings set out by local authorities. This includes limitations on the number of people who may be present, and the space to be maintained between people in a gathered setting.
- Printed orders of worship should not be distributed by ushers. If they are needed at all, it is best to place them in advance at appropriate seating locations in the worship space.
- Members of household groups living in the same space should not be required to observe separation from each other; but as a group they should observe physical separation from others.
- Choirs must also observe these requirements. In some instances this will mean that the size of choirs must be reduced. It has been credibly reported that singing significantly increases the spread of breath aerosols; that reality needs to be taken into account in each individual context.
- The peace should be exchanged without physical contact.
- The offering should not be collected by passing offering plates. Plates may be positioned at secure places in the space of the church in order to receive offerings. Members of congregations should be

strongly encouraged to make their contributions by means of electronic transfer to the church, and clear instructions should be given on websites as to how to do so.

- All gathered at the table during the celebration of Eucharist should use hand sanitizer immediately before the Eucharistic prayer. Warm water and soap is an acceptable substitute; but in either case, this must be done in the sight of the people.
- If the Eucharist is celebrated, it should not include the sharing of wine in any form. Even the use of individual cups involves recipients touching a tray of closely-spaced cups, and it is well established that touch is a principal vector of coronavirus transmission.
- Until further notice, wafers should be used for bread at Eucharist.
- Sanitizer or hand washing should be done once again before the distribution of communion.
- Our theology of ministry teaches that the Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving and praise undertaken by the whole people of God. We do not understand the Eucharist as an act performed by ordained people for the benefit of the laity. With that in view, celebrants of the Eucharist should reflect prayerfully on what is taught, intentionally or otherwise, by their participating in the receiving of something denied to the people.
- Similarly, our liturgical practice involves both the speaking of the Eucharistic prayer *over the elements to be consecrated*, as well as the touching of the bread and the vessel containing wine. Both of these are potential vectors of disease. It is therefore recommended that the bread be placed in a ciborium that is covered with a purificator during the Eucharistic prayer.
- The celebrant must break the host during the celebration of the Eucharist; this is an element of the foundation of our liturgy's shape (take, bless, break, share). Once it is broken, it should be consumed only by the celebrant and not made part of the distributed Eucharist.
- I hesitate to require all clergy to wear masks throughout the conduct of the liturgy. That said, it is to be remembered that purpose of masks is not to protect us from others, but to protect others from us; and that by itself is an act of Christian care. In ways large and small, clergy set an example for how others act themselves; this may suggest the wisdom of clergy wearing masks at least during the distribution of communion. Obviously, those receiving communion cannot wear masks while doing so.
- Those receiving the Eucharist should maintain appropriate physical distancing while doing so. This means both the line approaching the communion rail (or the place of distribution), and the separation between those receiving.
- Congregations should intentionally seek out ways of continuing to engage the virtual worshiping community that has developed in our season of online worship in the liturgies now offered in the setting of the church. Participants in these communities should be sounded out as to ways which the integration of actual and virtual is supporting them.
- This will mean a need to think about wifi or Internet access, appropriate systems for audio capture and cameras, etc. In our eagerness to return to the church, we must not abandon those who have found it possible to become part of our communities through these means.
- Virtual gatherings for worship, fellowship, and formation, as an extension of the ministry of our churches, should continue. We should think of this not as a separate, but an extended, reality of the church.
- In-person gatherings for fellowship (coffee hours, teas, etc.) should be suspended.
- Church School programs and adult formation offerings should be shifted to virtual platforms.
- Creches for infants should be suspended.
- Baptisms may be conducted in ways that observe local restrictions on gatherings. Infants should be

presented by members of their household living together. The parents, and not the priest, should hold an infant being baptized. A shell, cup, or other instrument should be used for the sprinkling of water. Chrismation, if it is offered at all, should be by means of oil dipped in a small cotton swab.

- Anointing the sick, as well as healing services involving the laying on of hands, is suspended.
- At the conclusion of any service of worship, clergy should not stand in the doorway to greet departing people. As well-intentioned as this would be, the inevitable consequence will be the closer and closer gathering of people in the departure line.

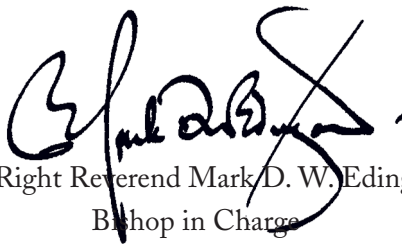
## *II. Ministries of Service*

- Those preparing the altar for worship must do so while observing physical distancing requirements.
- All volunteers or staff members counting a collection should (a) wear masks, (b) wear nitrile gloves, and (c) prepare the collection for deposit in sealed envelopes.
- All ministries of our churches—soup kitchens, recovery meetings, refugee assistance programs, prison ministries—must observe the requirements for distancing articulated by civil authorities.
- Congregations are encouraged to offer the use of their Zoom hosting accounts to those ministries displaced from their physical buildings.
- Whenever possible pastoral visitation should be accomplished through telephone contact.

## *III. The Work of the Church*

- All meetings of governing bodies—vestries, committees, etc.—should take place using virtual meeting technologies.
- All formation opportunities should be offered virtually.

I will revise this directive periodically as developments permit, and will communicate changes to parochial clergy and wardens.



The Right Reverend Mark D. W. Edington  
Bishop in Charge

## Regathering Plans for Parishes and Missions

*To parochial clergy and Wardens in the Convocation:*

The bishop and Council of Advice ask that leaders of the parishes and missions in the Convocation respond prayerfully and thoughtfully to the below questions in preparing a plan for regathering their communities as lockdowns enter a period of phased relaxation.

Consistent with emerging practice across the church, the bishop will give permission to parishes to open once these plans are submitted. **Responses to this questionnaire should be submitted to [bishop@tec-europe.org](mailto:bishop@tec-europe.org).**

1. How will you respond if your worship gathering is initially limited by local requirements to no more than (say) 100 people? If you are limited to a smaller number of people by our government leaders, what's the plan at your church to provide a place and time for them to worship?
2. Should you add and/or shorten worship services to allow for social distancing? If physical gatherings are limited in size, you may want to consider one or more of the following options:
  - (a) offer a larger number of services, limiting attendance at each;
  - (b) encourage people to continue worshipping online;
  - (c) remove chairs from your worship space, or mark seating spaces on pews, to help people avoid close contact;
  - (d) block off pews so that people no longer sit right behind someone.
3. How will you manage and potentially limit access? What additional role will ushers have in seating people, managing the flow of people at communion, and other moments of movement?
4. What adjustments will you make to the offering of communion, to baptisms and funeral gatherings, and to music ministry, in response to the bishop's pastoral directive?
5. How will you take up your weekly offering?
6. What are you doing now to sanitize and sterilize your church building—and to put in place a plan for doing so regularly? Will this require a new team of people whose ministry it is to walk around wiping door knobs and other surfaces? Now is the time for all this to take place, not the week of the “you can go back to church” announcement by government officials.
7. How will you continue to engage the communities whom you have served through virtual online worship?
8. In particular, will you need to invest in new digital equipment right now? Do you have adequate Internet connectivity, audio capture systems, and video cameras? Do you need help with planning this?

9. Who can oversee the technical aspects of your church's new digital frontier? Will a new staff or volunteer position emerge from COVID-19—someone whose job it is to oversee the technical aspects of the new digital frontier?
10. What is your plan when volunteers step down?
11. Do you have a plan for reducing expenses if your church's offerings don't rebound?

We will make responses to this questionnaire available to all other parochial leaders in the Convocation, so that we all may learn from each other as to how we are addressing common questions.