



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF ATLANTA

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Current Situation Summary

Last updated: 22 April 2020

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SUMMARY

As developments around the coronavirus continue to manifest at a rapid rate, the Diocese of Atlanta calls in our parishes to model best practices and behavior that can help stem the spread. The first case of the novel coronavirus in the United States was identified on January 21, 2020. Given that social distancing was not widely practiced here until very recently, it is highly likely that all of us have been in contact with someone who has been in contact with someone who has the virus. **That fact, in itself, is not a cause for alarm.** It is, however, a strong argument for practicing physical social distancing, while remaining connected to people through communications at a safe physical distance. *On March 24, the Rt. Rev. Robert Wright released an [updated statement](#) on how the Diocese will proceed in the coming weeks. Please visit this page often, as we will keep it updated with the latest status on a number of fronts.*

The Diocese of Atlanta is committed to following these practices and doing all we can to ensure the health and safety of our brothers and sisters. We are following the recommendations of government, medical experts and health authorities to do all we can to help stem the spread of the coronavirus, and so as of today, **the suspension of in-person worship and gatherings is extended to encompass the eight-week period, taking us at least through May 24.** Watch the Bishop's statement [here](#).

Updated April 3, 2020: The 73 ½ counties of our Diocese are currently under a statewide Shelter in Place order. We ask all to keep in mind that these shelter in place orders are not just about slowing the transmission of the virus, but also about the need to reduce the overall need for services like policing, emergency responses to accidents, and hospital visits due to accidents which makes some room in the system to better respond to the strain on our systems that the virus is creating.

NOTIFICATIONS OF COVID-19 CASES

We ask that any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in your parishes be reported promptly to the Canon to the Ordinary, [Alicia Schuster Weltner](#). We can support you in taking appropriate next steps and following both privacy requirements and Department of Health and CDC guidelines.

Worship and Pastoral

Policies for worship from sanctuaries:

In an attempt to ensure this effort is maximized in terms of improving safety, the following parameters are to be followed:

- The maximum number of people assisting with the livestream worship is 10, but fewer are strongly recommended:
 - 1 Celebrant or Officiant (priest, deacon or lay officiant); this person will also serve as preacher)
 - 2 Musicians (1 Organist or Pianist + 1 Cantor or Singer)
 - 1 Lector or 1 Server (priest, deacon or lay)
 - Video technology support (ideally 1; 2 if needed and can be safely physically spaced)
- Multi-clergy parishes should rotate celebrants and lectors or consider assigning different staff members to cover different online offerings (e.g. Eucharist, daily offices and formation.)
- Communion: The use of the common cup is to be suspended until this crisis has passed. Communion is to be offered in one kind, bread only and should be administered by the celebrant alone. Wine will be consecrated by the celebrant but not consumed during the service. Following the service, the normal practices of the parish will be followed concerning the consecrated wine and bread. The celebrant should visibly wash and sanitize their hands before consecrating and distributing the bread.
- Log everyone involved: every one of the 5-6 people assisting with the livestreaming should be signed in with contact information to ensure should someone become infected, exposure can be tracked and quarantined. Everyone involved should maintain effective physical distancing and ongoing self-monitoring around their health at all times.
- ERD has recommended masks be worn by those leading worship.
- LIVE IS NOT ALWAYS BEST: It is strongly recommended services be recorded; recording and showing later is often the most effective way to keep connected with your congregation.
- RECORDING ATTENDANCE: Please make separate notations of actual physical attendance of those participating in the service and electronic streaming or links opened reports say (and note as electronic and what mode--Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, etc.) This will be important information for your Diocese of Atlanta "5th Page" of the Parochial Report for 2020 which will be filed in 2021. At the present time, we do not expect online numbers to be reportable in the body of the Parochial Report.

Any non-essential gatherings of any size, should continue to be cancelled, postponed or moved online.

Weddings and Funerals

Weddings should be postponed. If there is a pastoral need for a marriage to take place under special circumstances, the clergy person should contact the Bishop.

For funerals, postpone any public gathering for a memorial service at a later time. Graveside services can probably be conducted with appropriate social distancing and other precautions. If there is a

pastoral need for a burial to take place under these special circumstances, the clergy person should contact the Bishop.

Baptisms and Confirmations

Baptisms and confirmations are to be postponed. In case of a pastoral emergency related to a baptism, please contact Bishop Wright.

Questions may be directed to Bishop Wright or Canon Alicia Schuster Weltner.

EUCCHARISTIC / PASTORAL VISITS

For now, **all home visits should be suspended** while research continues around best safety practices and alternatives to allow the pastoral care to continue without undue risk to either party and, by extension, the wider community. We understand this is an area of deep concern for our clergy and lay pastors. ***If the need for end of life ministry arises, clergy are asked to contact the Bishop.***

In the interim, we encourage you to coordinate with chaplains at hospitals and assisted living facilities to provide pastoral counsel to parishioners in their care. We also strongly support and encourage the continuing development of networks of telephone and virtual support ministry that can be shared amongst clergy and laity and expand our connections with each other even while we practice physical distancing.

DIRECT-SERVICE MINISTRIES

This is a unique area, as it is one of the few situations where closings are not yet mandated. We understand the discernment faced by those providing direct life-giving services such as food pantries, feeding ministries, and medical resources.

At this time, we are not directing any *essential* ministry to close or stay open. This is a discernment you must do around the health and safety of your workers, volunteers and clients. For those that continue, we direct such ministries to restructure as necessary after consulting with experts in the respective ministry areas to ensure best practices in this public health crisis context. The Canon to the Ordinary is available for discussions on these decisions.

GUEST GROUPS

Many of our churches extend the use and hospitality of their spaces to outside groups. Some of these are considered critical ministries and services, some are not. Clergy are asked to move all *recovery groups to online resources at least during the time of the Shelter in Place order. A link for online groups is [here](#).*

For now, provided you can meet physical distancing and cleaning requirements, we leave it to you to be in conversation with those direct service partners about whether or not to continue this hospitality to *essential* groups such as feeding programs; if you do, we strongly recommend you follow the recommendations of local health and government authorities. **If you cannot meet physical distancing requirements and safety precautions as outlined by health authorities, gatherings are not to be held.** The [Canon to the Ordinary](#) is available for discussions on these decisions.

Updated 4/2/20: Churches as polling places: If your church is a planned polling location for the May 19 primary, please be in touch with the [Canon to the Ordinary](#) if you are contacted about the availability of the building.

Administration and Finance

THE BISHOP'S OFFICES are currently closed with the Bishop's staff working from home until further notice. Finance staff visits the office on a rotating basis to collect mail, make deposits and prepare checks. Emails and voicemail messages are checked regularly.

ONLINE VESTRY AND OTHER MEETINGS

One area of concern for our churches is the ability of vestries to meet online and meet canonical requirements, especially as this is necessary while in-person meetings are suspended. It is our opinion that the governor's declaration that all corporations can conduct meetings virtually be given permission for this to happen in the present environment. All meetings should still be duly called and convened, and minutes taken and approved. Please contact the [Canon to the Ordinary](#) with questions.

All church meetings, *of any number*, should take place by teleconference or phone.

CHURCH STAFF AND SCHOOLS

Church staff members should be working from home. Those staff who need to visit the church to perform essential operations should do so on a rotating basis.

Parochial schools and daycare facilities should follow the recommendations and decisions of your county schools and county health officials. All public schools are closed for the remainder of the school year by order of Governor Brian Kemp.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

We are aware that Covid-19 will have a financial impact on parishes and that the financial impact will not be the same for all parishes. We have evaluated ways to alleviate financial strain on our parishes in need of relief at this time.

Diocesan Foundation Loan Payments

The Diocesan Foundation will assist parishes by being flexible on loan **payments due through June 30, 2020**. If your parish needs to defer principal and interest payments, without penalty, on their Diocesan loan, submit the online [Diocesan Foundation Loan Deferral Request](#). If you have any questions, you may contact Bonnie Burgess or Alicia Schuster-Weltner.

Support for Online Giving to Parishes

For those churches who do not have online giving options available to members, the Diocese has created a giving option to help gather donations. By using this [online giving link](#), donors may designate their giving for a specific church, or have the option to give to a general fund for those settings most in need in the future.

Canon 20 Commitment Payments to the Diocese

The Diocese is watching our cash position on a daily basis. Parish Canon 20 payments are our primary source of income and cash flow. We ask parishes to continue their monthly payments if at all possible. The Diocese can accept electronic payments. Check with your bank about whether they can set this up for you. If you plan to pay electronically, please notify [Eleni Papadakis](#). If the parish will not be able to fulfill the monthly commitment, contact Bonnie Burgess, Canon for Administration and Finance, via [email](#) or by calling 404-601-5350.

Church Insurance

Effective immediately, Church Insurance Company will be extending payments for 90 days beyond the effective/due date before cancellation. It will take them time to make adjustments to the system generated notices. If you have questions, contact the Church Insurance Company Billing Department directly in order to make the necessary adjustments. The toll-free number is 1-800-819-2984.

Church Medical Trust: Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Expenses

Pursuant to The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which became law on March 18, 2020, The Episcopal Church Medical Trust will waive all co-pays, deductibles, and coinsurance for its members for healthcare services relating to the evaluation and testing for COVID-19. In addition, the Medical Trust will waive all co-pays, deductibles, and in-network coinsurance for its active members for healthcare services relating to the treatment of COVID-19.

For retirees enrolled in a Medicare Supplement plan with United Healthcare, Medicare has announced that there will be no out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 lab tests. For more information regarding Medicare benefits, please visit <https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus>.

Church Pension Group

We are working with CPG to clarify the limited parameters under which they might offer to defer pension payments in the future per the letter they sent to all participants in the pension fund. We will update this section as we know more.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

All parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta are **required to share this information with employees immediately and to display a poster outlining the details of the FFCRA Act** once buildings are reopened. The poster may be downloaded [here](#). Please contact the [Canon to the Ordinary](#) with questions

The CARES Act and Paycheck Protection Loans

Guidance was sent to all clergy in a Clergy Update on April 2; that guidance is also posted [here](#).

BISHOP'S OFFICE REPORTING

Remarriage petitions, address updates, parochial reports, and other online reports can still be submitted online and will be responded to. Mail is also being received. If you need a timely response to

a report or document you normally would have mailed, please contact the appropriate staff member for guidance.

TRAININGS

All in person Safe Church and Dismantling Racism trainings are suspended for the present time. Online options are available for some Safeguarding training, and more are currently being developed. Contact Deborah Silver, Director of Safe Church programs, for information on these options.