A Plan For Returning to Church During the Covid-19 Outbreak

At Saint Paul’s Church
Augusta, Georgia
September, 2020
It may seem that the Church is slow to return to “normalcy” as the world around us is moving forward. The Church, however, operates by a different set of values. In our Baptismal Covenant we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.” It is this love for neighbor that drives our decision making. It is our care and concern for the other which informs our actions.

As we prepare for a return to in-person worship your Vestry has set out a plan for how to move forward safely in the midst of this pandemic. This plan follows the direction of the Diocese of Georgia and will, we believe, provide the safest gathering possible. We will continue to monitor the situation and work with each other, our clergy and Bishop as we move forward.
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The COVID-19 Phase 1 Worship Certification
Where we are as a community of faith during this Pandemic

As we are currently still in an area that has large numbers of people testing positive for COVID-19, Saint Paul’s will continue to offer an 11:00 a.m. on-line service as we have been doing. There are also virtual weekly Wednesday meetings for Noonday Prayer and Compline, and on Sundays the Rector’s Forum, Godly Play and even a Zoom coffee hour. Various committees are meeting on-line using Zoom as well.

The vestry will continue to closely monitor the financial needs of the parish as well as the ongoing buildings and grounds improvements and projects. Along with these, it is the mission of the vestry to work toward a plan for reopening the church in defined phases based on the and approved within the guidance of the diocese.

The Episcopal Diocese of Georgia COVID-19 Phase 1 Worship Certification has been considered by the vestry and submitted to the diocese for approval of our plan for reopening.
Regathering Stages

Present: In-person Gatherings Suspended

This phase is defined as when the number of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people (7 day moving average) are in the red zones as designated by Harvard Global Health and/or positive tests are increasing as well as hospitalizations and deaths in the CSRA.

- All in-person gatherings are suspended
- Parish office open by appointment only
- No rental of Saint Paul's facilities

Phase 1 Regathering: Limited In-person worship

This phase is defined as when the number of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people (7 day moving average) are in the orange and yellow zones as designated by Harvard Global Health and the number of new positive cases is on the decline and there are fewer hospitalizations and deaths in the CSRA.

- Continuing the present protocols and practices AND
- Begin “Sacred Space” for individual prayer and meditation in the Nave
- Begin 40-minute: Celtic Evening Prayer and Communion
- The Sacraments of Holy Baptism, Marriage, and the Burial of the Dead may be performed in conversation with the clergy.
- The altar guild and flower guild will return to serve in a limited fashion

Phase 2 & 3 Regathering: Limited In-person worship

This phase is undefined by the Diocese at this time and protocols have not been determined. As the number of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people (7 day moving average) decrease further in the yellow and green zones as designated by Harvard Global Health, and in conjunction with the Diocese, we will discern what expanded in-person worship and programming will be possible in the next two phases.

This section will be updated as new information is available.

Phase 4 Regathering: Joyful return to unlimited in-person worship

This phase is defined as when there is no longer a threat from COVID-19 and/or there is widespread vaccine access and utilization.

- Full worship schedule resumes with regular attendance
- All parish ministries and activities resume.
- The doors to Saint Paul’s Church are open daily
- Parish facilities are available for community use
Present Protocols and Practices:
In-person Gatherings Suspended

- All in-person gatherings have been suspended
- Sunday morning worship is celebrated via Facebook Live at 11:00 a.m., then posted to our website and YouTube to allow access throughout the week.
- Attendance on Sunday morning is limited to 2 priest, an organist, and a lay reader in the Chancel, and 2 AV technicians in the balcony.
- Hymns and singing are prerecorded and inserted into Sunday’s video feed to Facebook to stay within the diocesan guidelines.
- Funeral services may be performed with a limited number of people outside and in the Churchyard, in conversation with the clergy of Saint Paul’s Church.
- Weddings may be performed with a limited number of people inside the church in conversation with the clergy of Saint Paul’s Church.
- Wednesday Noonday Prayer and Compline gather on Zoom
- Formation classes, Vestry meetings, parish committee meetings, and parish life gatherings are conducted through Zoom
- The parish office is by appointment only from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday & 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. Friday.
- The altar guild serves on Saturday morning
- Masks are required for all parishioners, vendors, and visitors to the church
- Hospital and home visits are suspended
- Tyler Hall and the River Room are both closed for use by parishioners and outside groups at this time
Phase I Protocols and Practices: Scared Space
Limited In-person Gatherings

“Sacred Space” is made available for individual prayer and meditation in the Nave

- Attendance by reservation for specified times through Sign-up Genius and the parish office.
- A minimum of 30 minutes separation for all attendees
- Masks are required.
- A hands-free dispenser for hand sanitizer will be placed in the entry
- Pews used will be marked and not used again during that day
- The pew and nearby spaces will be sanitized after each visit.
- Signage will be placed at the doors and at the entrance to the church
- Masks will be available for those who arrive without a mask
- A Gathering Together page will be added to the Parish website along with links to Sign-up Genius or how to contact the office to sign up for Sacred Space
- An instructional video will be provided to the Parish with information on how to make a reservation to attend, where to enter into the church and what the expectations are for coming, with masks and reservations.
Phase I Protocols and Practices: Forty-minute Celtic Service
Limited In-person Gatherings

A Celtic Evening Prayer and Communion Service will be shortened to allow limited in-person worship weekly on Sunday evening at 5:30 p.m.

Worship Planning
- There will be no hymnals or printed materials.
- There will be no singing or wind instruments.
- There will be no procession
- The alms basins will be placed in entrance
- Passing the peace with a wave or a nod only
- All soft surfaces that are not easily sanitized will be removed from the Nave.
- Attendance is limited to 50 individuals including: 2 priest, a musician, and a lay reader, in the Chancel, 2 AV technicians in the balcony, and 4 ushers in the Nave, a member of the Altar Guild, and a Sexton.
- Attendance by reservation through Sign-up Genius and the parish office.
- This list will be filed by date to provide contact tracing in the event anyone develops coronavirus following attendance at the service.
- Available Seats are marked with removable post-it notes
- Signage will be placed at the doors and at the entrance to the church
- Masks will be available for those who arrive without a mask
- A Gathering Together page will be added to the Parish website along with links to Sign-up Genius or how to contact the office to sign up for attendance.
- An instructional video will be provided to the Parish with information on how to make a reservation to attend, where to enter into the church and what the expectations are for coming, with masks and reservations.

Arrival
- Masks are required. Masks will be available for those who arrive without a mask
- A hands-free dispenser for hand sanitizer will be placed in the entry center doors.
- Assigned seating by the ushers to marked locations filling from front to rear
- Prior to the service as parishioners enter, a votive candle may be lit, mindful of 10 ft. physical distancing. A fresh taper will be used by each parishioner and when finished the placed in water.

During the Service
- A team of 4 ushers will be in attendance for each service to check rosters, put out hand sanitizers and masks, guide others in following directional signs to their seats, and explain to those attending what the entrance and egress will be.
• A member of the Vestry will serve as one of the four ushers and will be at the door to check safety protocols and confirm directions and guidance.
• The exterior doors of the church will remain open during the time of worship services and post service sanitizing.
• Restrooms are available on an emergency basis only. Ushers will direct parishioners. Parishioners will not return to the service.
• Ushers will provide a photo and attendance roster to the parish office.
• Parishioners will NOT come forward for the laying on of hands during the Healing Service. A prayer is offered for the congregation.
• Communion is offered in one kind only. The Celebrant will distance themselves from the bread that is set on the altar for consecration. The bread will not be touched at the epiclesis with a gesture substituting for the rubrical requirement to lay a hand upon the element.
• Communicants proceed by row, singly into the center aisle of the church, mindful of a 10 ft. distance.
• The Celebrant, wearing gloves, reverently drops, not places, the wafer into the extended hands of the communicant.
• The Order of Service is altered so that the post-communion prayer is said prior to coming forward to receive Holy Communion which effectively concludes the worship experience as the communicant exits the church by the side aisles.
• Parishioners are encouraged to “go in peace” immediately to their car.

Following the Service
• Deep cleaning will occur following the service
• Offering will be placed in a sealed bag using gloves and placed in the vault by the Vestry member and one usher.
• Any remaining consecrated wafers will be place in the aumbry
• The HVAC will continue to run for 24 hours
• Attendance log and picture are emailed to the parish office.
How to Report an Infection or an outbreak

- Anyone who is infected with COVID-19 who has attended in-person worship or any other Parish activity is asked to immediately report that infection to the Rector, one of the Parish clergy, or to the Senior Warden. Also to contact their personal physician. They may also contact the office at the church.
- It will be determined by the clergy and senior warden if an outbreak has occurred (if three or more have infections at one time) at Saint Paul’s.
- The Rector will report an outbreak to Canon Lasch and to the Richmond County Health Department.
- If an outbreak occurs, the Parish will be notified by electronic communication and/or telephone and the church will be closed for at least 14 days from the date the outbreak was reported and confirmed.

A suggested script for reporting a possible exposure if calling parishioners:

I am calling to notify you that one of our parishioners who attended the worship service on __________ has tested positive for COVID-19 and that you may have been exposed to the possibility of infection yourself. Please contact your physician for any action you may need to take.
Appendix One
Diocese of GA Safer Standard Chart
Appendix Two
Office and Staff Protocol for all phases

- Individual workspaces and devices of the staff are to be sanitized each day at the start and close of business
- Masks are to be worn in the Parish Office and for all conversations that are more than a greeting
- Interactions are to pay attention to physical spacing and social distancing
- Meetings are scheduled in Tyler Hall, the Berlin Room, and the River Room rather than personal offices
- An awareness of social distancing and paying attention to proper hygiene and hand washing while in work spaces.
- Regular disinfecting of high touch areas, including door handles, postage machine and office copier
- Use of hand sanitizer before using shared office equipment (postage machine, copier, etc.)
- The Parish Office will remain open by appointment only for phase one
Appendix Three
Maximum Capacity allowed for the use of Parish Spaces

- The number of persons who may occupy a space is guided by the standard of 10 persons for every 300 square feet of space that is available.

- Irrespective of space available, the indoor maximum is 50 persons and the outdoor maximum is 20 family/pod units or 50 persons.

- The square footage of available meeting/gathering spaces is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Church</td>
<td>6912 sq ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The River Room</td>
<td>3,270 sq ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Berlin Room</td>
<td>1,074 sq ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler Hall</td>
<td>2886 sq ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Four
Seating Chart for Nave