

Formation Gathering Recommendations September 12, 2020

Initial Considerations:

We acknowledge the very real longing for in-person gatherings. Our communities of faith are comprised of diverse individuals who are hungry for and are often fed by face-to-face interactions. We encourage parish clergy and vestry leaders to have prayerful, open, and honest conversations with Christian formation staff/volunteers and parents to explore:

- Whether it is safe and secure to begin in-person formation in their church setting.
- Whether appropriate teacher/youth leader coverage is available for in-person formation gatherings.
- Whether adequate space is available to conduct formation programs.
- Whether a detailed cleaning/disinfecting protocol can be consistently followed including addressing the availability of disinfecting of supplies.
- A clear understanding that formation staff members/volunteers should not be required to conduct formation offerings if the staff members/volunteers believe they are vulnerable or will be exposed to unacceptable personal risk.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as cited in <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/Final-Phase-Guidance-for-Virginia-Schools-6.9.20.pdf> “the more people a student or staff member interacts with and the longer the interaction, the higher risk of COVID-19 spread:
 - **Lowest risk:** Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.
 - **More risk:** Small, in-person classes, activities, and events.
 - **Highest risk:** Full sized in-person classes, activities, and events where students are not spaced apart, share materials or supplies, and mix between classes and activities”
- Written plans for in-person formation activities shall be submitted to the Bishop’s Office for approval to assure compliance with requirements established by the government, recommendations issued by health care professionals, and the standards set forth in the Diocesan Re-Gathering Guidelines. Please consult the *Re-Gathering Standards for Youth, Canterbury and Adult Formation* chart for specific requirements for Christian formation events.

Children (defined as elementary school age (K-5th grade) and younger children)

In-person formation, including nurseries, should not take place for children at this time due to the following factors:

- Due to the high touch/interaction of children’s formation events, risk factors continue to be significant.
- Many formation teachers are themselves included in the at-risk category.
- Children have difficulty understanding the importance of consistent physical distancing expectations.

- Given the high touch aspect of supplies needed for children’s formation classes (markers, paint, clay, soft surfaces, blocks, kinetic sand, story materials, etc.) supplies cannot be shared.
- Challenges exist for bathroom use and cleaning of the facilities between each use.

Therefore, we encourage the continued use and development of on-line Christian formation opportunities for children and families.

Youth (defined as middle and high school aged (6th -12th grade) students)

Episcopal Youth Community formation groups may begin to meet in-person once the Bishop approves a written re-gathering plan submitted by the church’s clergy/vestry. The re-gathering plan must detail specific compliance with the *Re-Gathering Standards for Youth, Canterbury and Adult Formation* chart.

College Canterbury Programs

Approval to gather in-person for Canterbury programs will require demonstrated understanding of the specific college/university campus requirements for student organizations during COVID-19 restrictions. Chaplains should provide written plans to the Bishop detailing their planned compliance with both diocesan and college/university protocols for approval by the Bishop.

Adults

Adult formation groups may meet in-person once the Bishop approves the written re-gathering plan submitted by the church’s clergy/vestry. The re-gathering plan must detail specific compliance with the *Re-Gathering Standards for Youth, Canterbury and Adult Formation* chart.

Revision or suspension

In the event of a local surge in cases or regional diminishment of health care capacity, congregations may need to revise or suspend plans for public gatherings on short notice. Local trends must be monitored weekly by the parish Health Coordinator or Health Equity Team to assure that decisions to revise or suspend worship plans are timely. Vestry, clergy and formation staff/volunteers should be prepared to convene on 24-hour’s notice if changes in local health conditions warrant reconsideration of in-person formation protocols or the suspension of in-person formation, if necessary, in light of new information. Decisions to revise plans or suspend in-person formation must be communicated to the Bishop the same day. The Bishop may suspend worship or gathering at any time if, in the Bishop’s judgment, local changes in the number of cases, the number of deaths, the availability of essential health care, or similar developments warrant suspension.

**RE-GATHERING STANDARDS
FOR YOUTH, CANTERBURY AND ADULT FORMATION**

FOCUS AREA	CONDITIONS TO BE MET	YOUTH (middle and high school students)	CANTERBURY PROGRAMS	ADULTS
ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS	Colleges & Universities may have additional requirements that student groups are required to abide by. Consult your campus administrators for specifics.		✓	
ADVANCE REGISTRATION	Advance registration is required to safely manage the group size.	✓	✓	✓
AUTHORIZATIONS	<p>A permission slip/covenant (click here for form) signed by the participant and their parent/guardian must be obtained and kept on file for each event.</p> <p>The permission slip will acknowledge the specifics of the event, conditions for participation, as well as verification that the participant has not been ill for the previous 14 days.</p>	✓		
CONTACT TRACING	The formation event leader will record event participants on a tracking sheet to include: name, contact information and seating location to provide contact tracing data.	✓	✓	✓
DURATION OF EVENT	No more than 60 minutes	✓	✓	✓
FOOD & BEVERAGES	No food or beverages will be consumed during the formation event	✓	✓	✓
LOCATION OF EVENT	<p>When possible utilize outdoor spaces to assist in mitigating the risk of virus transmission.</p> <p>The guidelines for any in-person formation gathering must be followed regardless of whether the event takes place on church property or off-site.</p>	✓	✓	✓
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY	<p>All participants will wear face masks covering the nose and mouth.</p> <p>Masks may not be removed at any time.</p> <p>If participant has been out of state or visited a known “hot spot” they will not participate in events for 14 days from date of return.</p>	✓	✓	✓

**RE-GATHERING STANDARDS
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PHYSICAL CONTACT	The gathering will be “touch free” - no materials will be shared during the course of the formation event i.e. Prayer Books, Hymnals, and Bibles. Physical passing of the peace is suspended	✓	✓	✓
RESTROOMS	Restrooms should be closed and used for emergency use only.	✓	✓	✓
SIGNAGE	Signage will be posting stating that no one with a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 or who has known exposure to COVID-19 in the prior 14 days is permitted to participate Posting signage regarding the mandatory observance of CDC and Virginia Department of Health public health standards including the wearing of face masks, 6-foot social distancing, and not attending if ill or symptomatic.	✓	✓	✓
SANTIZATION	Hand sanitizer stations will be available and participants will sanitize their hands as they enter and exit the event. A thorough cleaning and sanitization plan is followed before and after the event. Adequate cleaning supplies are available	✓	✓	✓
SINGING	Singing and shouting are not permitted to assist in mitigating the risk of virus transmission.	✓	✓	✓
SPACING	6-foot social distancing (36 square feet per person) will be maintained at all times. This will most likely limit the number of participants that can be accommodated for the event.	✓	✓	✓
SUPERVISION	The number of safe church trained adult leaders present will be <u>increased by at least one additional leader</u> to help ensure that all health protocols are observed.	✓		
TRAFFIC FLOW	A directional flow of participants will be identified and reviewed to ensure that social distancing is maintained as participants enter and exit the formation space. Movement in the formation space will be restricted to assure that social distancing is maintained at all times.	✓	✓	✓