

UPDATE FROM ADVISORY PANEL FOR RE-GATHERING THE CHURCH

May 19, 2020

Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia

The Advisory Panel that is assisting Bishop Haynes to develop some guidelines for re-gathering the church continues its work in earnest. We are aware that many are eager to return to church buildings but want to do so as safely as is possible. We assure you that the guidelines will be issued soon. In the meantime, church leaders and Vestries might begin thinking of the following matters which the panel most certainly will recommend:

- The appointment of health and safety officer in each parish who can oversee the compliance with health and safety guidelines. This does not necessarily have to be a medical person (such as a doctor or nurse), but someone who is familiar with the guidelines and can oversee their implementation parish-wide.
- The ordering and securing of health, cleaning and sanitizing supplies such as hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, and face masks. The development of protocols for cleaning and sanitizing the building after each use.
- The removal of prayer books and hymnals from the pews unless a protocol is developed to sanitize them in between services.
- The measuring of seating space and marking of seats so that 36 square feet is afforded each unit that is seated in the pews (noting that family units may be counted as one unit). ***It is worth considering that the usual worship space in the building may not be the best room in which social distancing is the most easily accomplished. Consider your parish halls or other large rooms as temporary worship spaces for the sake of social distancing.***
- Paying attention to how traffic flows through the space so that people enter by one way and exit by another.
- Consideration by church musicians of other forms of music besides choral and congregational singing (at least in the initial re-entry phases).
- Continued use of on-line worship for those vulnerable members who should not return to the building initially.

These are just a few suggestions of what churches can be doing now to get ready. God is empowering us to be the Church during this pandemic. We are called to respond.