

Christ Episcopal Church
Springfield, MO
Phase Two Reopening Plan

Introduction

Christ Episcopal Church in Springfield (CEC) has been closed to in-person worship and all other significant gatherings since March 18, 2020, to limit the risk of spreading the SARS-CoV-2 virus and in accordance with the directive from the Bishop of West Missouri.

Since that time, all activities have been conducted via various social media platforms in order to provide live-streamed daily Evening Prayer, pre-recorded weekly Spiritual Communion, and online Christian formation and fellowship for children/youth/adults. The attendance and feedback from these virtual gatherings has been positive, but members are eager to return to the worship space when it is prudent and safe to do so.

This plan represents the collective decision of the Rector, Wardens, and Vestry of CEC for the initial resumption of in-person worship at the church upon diocesan approval of this plan. It was created in consultation with church staff and health care professionals who are members of the congregation, and it follows the recommendations of the Bishop of West Missouri as well as local, state, and national civic officials.

Local Phase Two Planning

As of June 10, 2020, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department reports:¹

- 203 total cases of COVID-19 (183 confirmed, 20 probable) since the onset of the disease
- 8 total deaths attributed to the disease (7 confirmed, 1 probable); no deaths have been reported since April
- In the two-week period of May 22-June 6, confirmed cases by symptom onset date have held steady at about 2-3 new cases per day
- There are 59 active cases, 136 have been released from isolation, and 31 have required hospitalization; more than 15,000 diagnostic tests have been conducted
- The local and regional health care facilities have high capability scores to handle the disease at the present time, and testing capability is 5.8 out of 10

On June 15, 2020, the Springfield-Greene County government implemented its “Phase 3 Road to Recovery Order” which further lessened the restrictions on business and community activities. It allows for in-person religious services to operate, provided that “the maximum number of persons allowed at any one time for a particular facility shall be limited to 35 or the result of the

¹ Data from the Springfield-Greene County Health Department website, <https://www.springfieldmo.gov/5147/Recovery-Dashboard>; accessed June 10, 2020

total square feet of the facility divided by 30 times fifty (50) percent, whichever is greater.”²
Applying that formula to the CEC facility would allow:

- Sanctuary: $3,213 \text{ ft}^2 / 30 \times 50\% = 53$ maximum occupancy limit

Due to the physical limitations of the worship space, the plan is to limit attendance to 35 in the nave.

The city/county government plans to revisit these restrictions prior to July 5 and will issue additional directives if warranted. The leadership of CEC will continue to monitor and adhere to the recommendations of the local health department and civic government, and will modify its own operation plan as necessary.

Continue Online Worship and Formation

CEC will continue to offer pre-recorded weekly Ante-Communion services with a prayer for Spiritual Communion as has been the practice for those who are not able or are not yet comfortable to attend in-person gatherings. Live Evening Prayer services will also continue on a regular basis.

All Christian Formation during the summer (as desired) will take place virtually and not within the facility. The children’s worship service which usually runs concurrent to the principal Sunday service will be suspended until such time as proper health practices can be observed. Likewise, the nursery will be closed and not be allowed to operate during this period.

Parents of young children, however, should not feel as though they cannot attend in-person worship; rather, they will be encouraged to bring their children into the worship space if they feel it is safe to do so.

Worshipping Together

Prior to the resumption of in-person worship, the following steps will be accomplished to ensure that the building is properly prepared for safe and healthy occupation.

- The entire facility will be disinfected, especially high-touch items such as door knobs, stair railings, backs of pews, etc.
- All prayer books and hymnals will be removed from the worship space
- Water fountains will be disabled and/or otherwise restricted from use
- Bathrooms will be closed to the public except for emergencies
- Hand sanitizer will be provided throughout the facility

² Springfield-Greene County Phase 3 Road to Recovery Order, Section II:A.ee.i, <https://www.springfieldmo.gov/DocumentCenter/View/49172/Road-to-Recovery-Phase-3-Order>; accessed June 15, 2020

- Every other pew in the nave will be roped off to facilitate social distancing, and the parish hall will be closed

Once the facility is prepared, in-person worship gatherings at CEC facility will be subject to the following:

- Occupancy limitations based on the numbers above (or amended per local government updates); attendance for a service would be allocated by taking online and telephone reservations
- Coffee, doughnuts, and other food and drink will not be provided nor allowed in the facility
- Attendees (except children under the age of two) will be required to wear face coverings at all times while in the building; those who do not have masks will be provided one upon entry
- Temperature checks will be administered to everyone before entering the nave for in-person worship. People with a fever or more than 100.4, according to the Centers for Disease Control guidelines, will be asked to return home. In doing so, they will be able to take care of themselves and of their fellow church members by preventing exposure of them to potential infection
- Seating will be limited to one family unit per pew, and proper social distancing outside of family units will be required for all participants
- At the conclusion of the service, all will exit the building through the nearest doors and will be asked to refrain from gathering where proper distancing cannot be maintained

Changing the Schedule and Location of Worship

CEC will conduct one in-person service per week at a time to be determined. Depending on the demand of those who request a reservation, an additional service could be scheduled in subsequent weeks.

Options for Principal Liturgies

As mentioned above, the weekly online worship offering will continue to be a service of Ante-Communion with a prayer for Spiritual Communion. This service will be pre-recorded and posted to social media on Saturday evening prior to the proper Sunday.

In-person worship will be the full service of Holy Eucharist with Communion while taking the following necessary precautions to minimize the risk of transmitting disease.

- The Celebrant, preacher, and lay reader (if applicable) will be allowed to briefly remove their masks when specifically leading a prayer or delivering a sermon or lesson
- Holy Communion will be celebrated and administered according to this procedure:

- a. Sanitization protocols (see below) and masking will be observed by all, including the clergy
- b. Only the Celebrant will be allowed to set the altar and will be the sole person standing at the Holy Table
- c. Communion elements will include: one “priest’s host,” additional wafers prepared in a sealed ziplock bag, and a very small amount of wine in a stopped cruet (no chalice); although both elements of bread and wine will be consecrated, only the bread will be administered (per the bishop’s dispensation)
- d. At the mention of the bread in the Eucharistic Prayer, the Celebrant is to lay hands upon the closed and sealed ziplock bag; the stopper will remain in the cruet at the mention of the wine
- e. The Celebrant will break the “priest’s host” at the appointed time, and then will consume it entirely prior to communion of the people
- f. The cruet of wine will NOT be consumed, but rather will be placed in the aumbry until such time as all are allowed to drink from the cup
- g. The people will be invited for communion one pew at a time: they will come to the bottom of the chancel steps where the bread will be dropped into their hands by the Celebrant, and they will be instructed to consume it only after returning to their seat; the next group will be excused only after the previous one has returned to their seat
- h. After all have been communicated, the Celebrant will immediately consume any leftover wafers; they will not be placed in the aumbry

Greeting and Handouts

Orders of service with the entire liturgy and necessary announcements/guidelines will be printed and placed on seats prior to any gathering. Any orders left after a service will be immediately recycled, not reused.

There will be a single point of entry into the building (the doors by the church office), with doors held open so that no one needs to touch the door handle. Ushers and greeters in masks will be at this door and in the worship spaces to monitor and count how many are in the nave. Door ushers (or other trained personnel) will take the temperatures of those entering the building and will also provide masks for those who need them.

Singing and Choirs

Choirs and congregational singing will be suspended during in-person worship until such time as the enhanced risk of viral transmission through singing is abated. Organ meditations and other instrumental music, however, will be highly encouraged.

The virtual service will continue to allow and highlight soloists and small ensembles since the recordings are made in a more controlled environment with fewer participants. Hymn texts are provided to those watching at home.

Passing the Peace

Physical contact of any kind (handshakes, hugs, etc.) will be highly discouraged outside of immediate families. At the passing of the peace, people will be asked to reverently nod, bow, wave, or make some other friendly gesture of fellowship with each other.

Offering Plates & Giving

Offering plates will be located on tables near the entrance to the worship space and will remain there until the conclusion of the service. CEC will continue to encourage members to make their regular offering through online giving or by mail.

Other Rites & Rituals

At this time, CEC does not have any weddings planned for the facility, so the local situation will be evaluated when one is requested.

There are three pending funerals. The Rector is in discussions with the families regarding the arrangements. One option is to delay the funeral services until it is safe to have them, and another is to conduct outdoor graveside services in the near term for the immediate family members and to hold memorial services in the church later.

Two baptisms have been delayed by the closing of the church, one for an infant and another for an adult. Discussions are being held to possibly conduct this initiation rite in an outdoor venue or to continue postponing the service until it is safe to do so in the church with a larger worshipping community.

Administrative Office Procedures

The staff of CEC has been productively working from home in the course of this pandemic and will likely continue to do so until conditions improve considerably. All mail is being forwarded to the home of the Parish Administrator. The Administrative Assistant, who only lives a few blocks away from the building, is able to quickly deal with any issues at the facility, and the members of the clergy are available by telephone for any pastoral and administrative needs that arise.

Small Groups & Outside Groups

The only groups that have been utilizing the building are the Outreach Ministry, whose members assemble sack lunches for the hungry in the neighborhood, and the Faithful Folders, who gather to prepare the monthly church newsletter for mailing. Both groups consist of fewer than six

people at a time, and they observe required physical distancing and masking as they do their work.

No outside groups use the facility during the summer. In the fall, when such groups begin to gather again, existing health and safety measures will be reviewed before allowing access.

Sanitizing Protocols

Once in-person worship resumes, all attendees will be required to use hand sanitizer upon entry into the building. They will also be encouraged to reapply sanitizer prior to receiving communion.

The Celebrant will use hand sanitizer immediately prior to the Eucharistic Prayer, and he will use it again before and after the distribution of communion.

After each service, all hard surfaces in the building will be cleaned and disinfected before the facility is used again.

Correcting Unsafe Practices

If any members fail to follow the prescribed precautionary measures because of ignorance or refuse to do so because of stubbornness, then the clergy and lay leaders will respond in a firm but pastoral way, reminding the person or persons that these measures exist to ensure his or her or their well-being, as well as that of people nearby. The person or persons who refuses to adhere to the safeguards will be asked to refrain from worshipping in person, until he or she decides to abide by the established guidelines.

Revisit the Plan Regularly

The Rector, Wardens, and Vestry of Christ Episcopal Church will continually revise and amend this plan to conform to the updated orders or guidelines of local governing entities and based on comments from the congregation.

This plan, as well as all amendments and revisions, will be communicated to the members of the parish through email, postal mail, social media, and other means as necessary.