

Church of the Good Shepherd - Covid Respite

At our April meeting, the Good Shepherd Vestry gave its approval for our Good Shepherd community to observe a two-week covid respite, from Monday June 20 through Monday July 4.

A two-week church respite was recommended for all Episcopal churches in our Diocese by our Bishops and the Standing Committee of our Diocese (see their letter below), in recognition of the exhausting work of the pastoral and worship staffs of churches, as we worked to keep our church communities together and functioning under difficult and trying times during the pandemic. Clergy especially need an extra break to refresh and renew themselves. The covid respite is to be in addition to staff vacation time off.

Over the past two years, I have felt the effects of stress related to finding ways to effectively worship together online, provide online educational offerings, and provide pastoral care; all the while doing all I can to keep our community together and safe. I was certainly not trained to do this kind of ministry, so it has taken a lot of energy and creativity to keep us together. With God's help we have come through this time and are beginning to get back to some semblance of normalcy.

The covid respite will mean that there will be no Sunday (June 26 and July 3) or Weekday Services (June 22 & 29), no educational offerings, no church newsletter, and no church meetings from June 20 through July 4. The parish office will not be open, but church mail will be picked up and church messages will be monitored by Cathi Maurice, our office manager. In the event of a pastoral emergency, parishioners can be in contact with me through my cell phone number. All non-emergency church business will be suspended during our covid respite. Our Food Pantry and Good Shepherd's Table meal will still be open on Thursdays.

On Sunday mornings, parishioners are encouraged to view the 11:15am Sunday Service from the Episcopal National Cathedral (<https://cathedral.org/worship/>) or attend one of the other Episcopal Churches in the area, since the other Episcopal Churches will be taking their covid respite on different weeks. Other Episcopal Churches in the area include St. Peter's in Buzzards Bay, St. Gabriels in Marion, and Christ Church in Plymouth. We may also be visited by parishioners of other Episcopal Churches when their churches are taking their covid respite weeks.

For more information about the covid respite, please read the letter from our Bishops and our Diocesan Standing Committee which is found below.

If you have any questions about this covid respite, please contact either myself or Becky Hansen (our Senior Warden).

Peace,
Pastor Dan

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Letter From Our Bishops and Our Diocesan Standing Committee

March 22, 2022

Dear People of the Diocese of Massachusetts,

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” —John 10:10

As we mark the second anniversary of the initial COVID shutdowns, we rejoice at the adaptability, resilience, and faithfulness which have been manifest in our congregations. We also recognize the deep fatigue which has resulted from the constant array of evolving challenges.

Our lay and ordained employees and leaders have gone above and beyond to adapt worship, maintain connections, provide pastoral care, protect the health and well-being of our communities, and continue to be the church in creative and Gospel-rooted ways. Words cannot express our collective gratitude for these devoted labors.

Data also show that church workers and their families are exhausted, anxious, and stressed. We commend those who are accessing mental health services, aware also that obtaining such services can prove challenging for many. We note a rise in clergy and lay employees of all backgrounds leaving active ministry or seeking early retirement; this is a painful reality in our church.

We are concerned for the entire human community in its suffering in this pandemic. We take seriously the special responsibility which the bishops and

Standing Committee have for care of clergy and church employees. Following God's example of resting on the seventh day of creation and the example of Jesus, who throughout the Gospels takes leave to rest, we now urgently invite our diocese to provide a COVID Respite for our clergy and lay employees.

We urge each worshipping community/ministry setting to identify two consecutive work weeks when meetings, office hours, and non-essential activities would be suspended. The timing of COVID Respite weeks is at the discretion of each ministry setting. We urge the identification of a period in the first half of 2022, if at all possible. Pastoral emergencies, of course, will be attended to. The COVID Respite should not count against vacation time, sick time, or continuing education time. Pay and benefits should continue for both salaried and hourly employees.

It is not our expectation that Sunday worship be canceled altogether during the COVID Respite. Options for worship could include worship with another congregation in our diocese; or joining the global community worshipping online with our National Cathedral at www.cathedral.org.

This is a voluntary program, but we are asking with our whole hearts for participation. The well-being of our church employees is of utmost concern and our biblical call to rest is clear. As our "[Way of Love](#)" resources remind us, "By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness."

We invite you to notify either Bishop Gates's office (lsimons@diomass.org) or Bishop Harris's office (dames@diomass.org) when your COVID Respite will take place, so we can offer special prayers for you. We welcome questions about this initiative. We know that many congregations will require creativity in applying this plan. Please join us in living into our call to rest and provide rest for those who so urgently need it.

Faithfully, in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop Diocesan
The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Bishop Suffragan
Mr. William Boyce, President of the Standing
Committee (williamcboyce99@gmail.com or 774-328-2383)
The Rev. Debbie Phillips, Vice President of the Standing
Committee (gcis1@verizon.net)

Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts COVID Respite FAQs

Who is included in the COVID Respite?

Clergy—both priests and deacons

Lay employees (specifically our music ministry team)

Is the COVID Respite required?

Although this is not required, your worshiping community is strongly encouraged to participate. We believe this respite is a needed Christian response for our call to love one another, the growing burnout and strain on our clergy and lay employees, and a direct expression of God's call for us to rest.

Should we cancel Sunday services?

Although it is not our intention to require the cancelation of Sunday services, we encourage you to consider doing so, and you will have our full support if you choose this option. We encourage consideration of alternative options for worship, such as those suggested in the letter.

Other than weekday meetings and services, what else should be canceled during our COVID Respite?

We imagine this being a respite for the whole worshiping community. We encourage you to cancel all non-essential activities. This will require all of us to resize our expectations for the two weeks of respite. Many of us are accustomed to receiving various communications (e-mails, phone calls, mail, newsletters, etc.) from our worshiping community and/or its leaders. During the two-week COVID Respite we encourage you to stop all unnecessary activity and to take on the spiritual practice of rest, together.

The goal of this program is to provide respite and rest for the whole community. Many of us know the pressure and extra work often put in right before we go away on vacation. We hope and intend that the COVID Respite is different. We invite you to avoid front-loading or overloading surrounding weeks to your COVID Respite. Doing so creates additional burden, stress, and anxiety that is already abundantly present in all our lives.

What other alternative worship resources are available to our worshiping community?

We encourage you to invite your worshiping community to join with other local worshiping communities for services during the COVID Respite. This will require up-front communication and collaboration.

Is the COVID Respite taken from paid time-off?

COVID Respite time does not count against vacation time, sick time, or continuing education time. This is additional paid time off.

How should pay for salaried employees be handled?

Pay and benefits should continue for salaried employees.

All employees' pay and benefits should be paid as if the employee worked a regularly scheduled week of work.

Pay should not be taken out of vacation time, sick time, continuing education time, or other pre-existing paid time off accruals.