



Temporary pandemic protocol for congregations

This document provides the temporary procedures for divine services and other activities during the pandemic threat. Thereafter, the Apostles will determine when to return to normal protocol for our normal divine service experience. At every stage, the New Apostolic Church USA will comply with the local, state, and national requirements for gatherings; those attending permitted gatherings will be required to comply with them as well.

1. Reopening the church buildings

- a. After it is determined nationally that congregations can start to reoccupy their church buildings, the rectors and district leaders will work in conjunction with their apostle to determine the most appropriate reoccupation date based on the regional health requirements and restrictions on public gatherings.
- b. Prior to a church building being utilized again, please comply with the NAC USA Building Reoccupation Guidelines, available on Minister Companion.
- c. Hand sanitizer stations should be made available in high traffic areas so that they are noticeable. When possible, however, it should be noted that hand washing is a more effective way to prevent transmission.
- d. If the local church building does not allow the number congregants to spread out with enough distance between them, more than one service per Sunday and having members come to one or the other will be required.
 - i. This will require pre-planning to determine the number desiring to attend and determining the need for another service and how the members can be distributed.
- e. It is critical that our members attend only in their local congregation, once opened unless otherwise informed. Visiting other congregations will cause additional attendance which may not be accommodated safely.
- f. Beyond Holy Communion, any other sacramental acts and blessings will be handled on a case by case basis and should be discussed with your local apostle.
- g. During this time, the divine services should be no longer than 45 to 60 minutes maximum, however, allowing sufficient time for Holy Communion without rushing.



2. Before service

- a. If required by state or local regulations, all attendees will need to wear a face mask. Officiants will remove theirs during the sermon.
- b. Greeters should be prepared to greet with cautious care and set the tone for what the member can expect for this modified church experience. They should remind members as they arrive that we must practice social distancing, i.e. greeting with a nod and refraining from shaking hands and hugging.
- c. Greeters should be aware of any changes to the social distancing protocol and communicate with members.
- d. It may be wise to keep all doors open (except lavatories) to minimize touching handles.
- e. Ushers should ensure social distancing is maintained within the sanctuary and kindly discourage groups of people congregating too closely (i.e. in the fellowship area). Further, they should also help stagger the flow of attendees into and out of the sanctuary.
- f. When sitting in the sanctuary, members should stagger their seating in order to leave 6ft between themselves, both across the pew/seats as well as in front and behind. Naturally, people of the same household can sit more closely.
- g. There should only be a very limited number of ministers in the sacristy before or after service, depending on space available.
- h. Group singing should be limited to the opening hymn, three fold amen, and closing hymn. The worship and other music in the service should be organ/ piano pieces, non-brass or woodwind instruments, solos, or very small groups.

3. Holy Communion protocol for congregants

- a. When coming forward for Holy Communion, members should leave at least 6 ft between themselves and the person in front of them in line.
- b. When receiving Holy Communion from the minister, the members should extend the open palms of their hands as approaching to allow the dispensation of the wafer without touching and stay at arm's length away from the minister.
- c. If a face mask is required, the communion wafer should be carried away and taken either on the way back to your seat or once seated.



4. Holy Communion protocol for ministers

- a. It is important to have temporary modifications to our Holy Communion procedures to ensure that Holy Communion is being served in a hygienic manner, still preserving the sanctity of the celebration.
- b. *Preparing the chalice(s)*
 - i. Additional care must be exercised in preparing and maintaining the chalices and communion, including wearing a face mask.
 - ii. For the first service, the chalices should be washed with soap and water and allowed to air dry. Thereafter, this should be done after every service.
 - iii. The minister preparing the chalice for service needs to wash their hands immediately prior to performing this activity and while doing it being careful not to touch anything that could contaminate the wafers.
 - iv. Obviously, anyone with any kind of cold or illness symptoms should not prepare the wafers.
 - v. The communion wafers should be handled as little as possible. They should be spilled directly into the chalice and after service poured directly back into the storage container. In the past, in some congregations, ministers placed the wafers into the chalice by hand to minimize wafer dust and chips from getting in the chalice. This practice carries a significant risk and should be avoided for now.
- c. *Consecrating Holy Communion*
 - i. *Hand cleaning* – All serving priests must use hand sanitizer, in an obvious yet dignified manner, after the officiant says “We will now celebrate Holy Communion” but before the consecration is spoken. This allows the hand sanitizer time to dry during the time the consecration is spoken. Thereafter, put on the face mask. Where possible, it would be preferred that another priest, in lieu of the officiant, serve communion
 - ii. *Masks* – Ministers should wear protective masks during dispensation. Remembering the holiness of the celebration, the masks worn by ministers should be a solid color (preferably white or pastels) without any distracting insignias, team logos, or expressive patterns.



d. *Ushering*

- i. It is best if one priest serves Holy Communion for a section, allowing the members to come forth and back again alone in an aisle, in order to eliminate multiple lines of traffic in an aisle.
- ii. If the church has 4 or more aisles, alternating sections can be served Holy Communion so that members in the aisle (either proceeding to the altar or returning to their seat) do not pass each other.
- iii. The ushers (with masks) should only let one row go at a time keeping in mind the necessity of the 6ft physical distancing and take caution not to touch anyone.

e. *Serving*

- i. The officiant should not clutch the chalice close to his body while serving but discretely increase the distance from himself, as even a few extra inches between him and the member is beneficial. Naturally, we still look in the eyes of each member.

f. *Dispensing the wafer*

- i. When the minister places the communion wafer into the member's hand, it is imperative that he not touch the member with his hand. He should not 'drop' the wafer into the hand from any height, but hold the wafer vertically between the fingers, touching the edge against the member's hand before releasing it.
- ii. Care should be exercised so as not to touch anything other than the communion wafer with the serving hand.

5. Online services

- a. It is understandable that members may not feel comfortable gathering with others in the congregation. Please exercise understanding, as some may be more vulnerable or concerned than others.
- b. Further, those who are ill or have vulnerable medical conditions should refrain from attending until such time as they recover, or the pandemic subsides.
- c. For these reasons, live online church services will continue to be provided without the need for a password during this time.



6. Sunday School, Youth Group, and Small Groups

- a. Once allowable by government guidelines, these groups can gather, as local social distancing circumstances will allow. However, many members of these groups, and/or their parents, may not want to participate immediately.
- b. Where possible, encourage remote options (Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts, etc.) so that participants can creatively connect.
- c. Whenever groups decide to physically meet again, they should proceed with sensitivity and caution.

7. Material needs

- a. During this time, families in the church and/or community may have experienced loss of employment, furloughs, or difficulty working. Where possible, consider collecting food and basic supplies that could be made available to help those in need during this season or creating a list of local food banks, Salvation Army locations, etc. where these supplies are available.
- b. If you are aware of severe economic distress situations, please bring them to the attention of your rector.