FAQs Specifically Related to COVID-19 and the Diocese of Newark
April 23, 2020

How has worship changed in the Diocese of Newark?
Bishop Hughes has said (as of March 20, 2020) there are no gatherings for worship of any kind in the Diocese of Newark.

What about live streaming or recording for online worship?
Bishop Hughes’ preference is that worship be live streamed or recorded from the home of the clergy person or worship leader. Clergy persons and worship leaders in high-risk categories are expected to do so.

Can worship be live streamed or recorded in church buildings?
With limitations, yes. Up to three (3) people may be in the church building to live stream or record worship. Church buildings are closed to normal operations at this time, and all tenants should be urged to comply with the Governor’s Executive orders.

What about pastoral visits or communion visits? What about anointing of the sick?
There are no in person pastoral visits of any kind, including to bring communion or anoint the sick. Pastoral care must take place by phone or video conference during this time, including prayers offered for healing and responding to pastoral needs.

Is it possible to have a church wedding during this time?
There are no weddings of any size at this time, no matter where they take place unless there are extraordinary circumstances (such as one of the people to be married is on the brink of death or about to be deployed).

What about funerals?
Families are strongly urged to consider cremation and postponing funerals until a later date. In any case, there are to be no funerals in the church building with the body present or with a congregation. The priest may live stream a memorial service from the church building with no one else present. The priest may do a graveside service with the body present for the Committal, but with no family members present. The graveside service may be live streamed or recorded for the family.

Why is this all so strict? I heard/read something different?
Bishop Hughes is conforming to Executive Orders No. 104 and 107 of New Jersey Governor Murphy.

Bishop Hughes has told the clergy that the primary goal beyond complying with the Governor is keeping people alive. All our other Christian values flow into and through this. We are not
demonstrating Christian love as expressed in the Golden Rule, if we do things that put others at risk of serious illness or death. Funerals and weddings, for example, have been demonstrated to be major sources of spread of the virus around the country. Weddings and funerals are not required to take place or to take place in a specific time frame; during pandemic this is even more the case. Finally, because of the emotional nature of both kinds of events they are especially difficult to manage ensuring social distancing, and a large percentage of our clergy and potential attendees are in high-risk groups. We honor the obligations of our faith in this time most fully by seeking to care for one another by preserving human life as the highest priority consideration.

Can the Church still be the Church with these limitations?
The Church is grounded in prayer, common study of Scripture, worship, caring for those in need, and seeking God’s justice and reconciliation in the world. All these ministries continue, some in new ways, even while we are distant from one another. While we gain much from gathering together, the heart of who the Church is continues during this time and can even find new ways to flourish.

How do I know if I’m looking at the most up to date information?
This FAQ will be updated regularly as will the Diocese of Newark COVID-19 page.

Who do I contact if I have a question about these instructions?
Contact the Bishop’s Office through the Canon to the Ordinary, Canon Andrew Wright (awright@dioceseofnewark.org).

When will the Bishop relax these instructions and when will things get back to normal?
The Bishop will be working with information from public health and civic officials prior to any consideration of changing any of these instructions. She has invited the clergy to consider the possibility that things will not get back to normal anytime soon, possibly not until there is a vaccine and/or treatment that is widely available. Because testing is still not broadly implemented, even if some relaxation is possible, it will potentially be temporary (as the pandemic will likely go in waves) and the nature and size of church gatherings may still be greatly reduced. The Bishop’s Office is working to shift many scheduled events for the diocese online, and to use the opportunities of this time to create new possibilities and conversations about being the Church.

What if I need help or support for something not connected to these topics?
The Bishop’s staff are all working from home and stand ready to work with you. The easiest method of contact is to send an e-mail to the appropriate person (see the Staff Directory). If needed, we will re-direct you to one of our colleagues. This COVID-19 resource page also contains information about online worship around the diocese, ways to do worship at home, mental health resources, resources for children and much more. If there is something else you would like to see posted, please contact Director of Communications Nina Nicholson (nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org).