

Bishop's Customary for In-Person Outdoor Services for Holy Matrimony and Burial of the Dead

June 3, 2020

Recognizing that New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy has begun to relax various provisions of outdoor public gatherings, the following arrangements may be put in use by local clergy and congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark for these two rites of Marriage and Burial.

Clergy canonically resident and licensed in the diocese may resume conducting marriages and burials using this Customary.

As of today, marriage and burial services in the Diocese of Newark may be conducted **outdoors** with **10 or fewer persons present**, including the officiant, funeral home personnel if any, wedding photographer if any – including all present. The service may be recorded or livestreamed by one of those present, allowing for remote participation by others. Keeping a smaller number permits simpler guidelines than those that exist for 25 person gatherings on a regular Sunday schedule. If on church property, this does not envision access to church buildings, including restrooms.

Note: No clergy person is expected to conduct these ceremonies, but may do so. If the clergy person is in a high-risk category, they are strongly urged to decline to officiate. A substitute officiant can be found by contacting Canon Wright or, in the case of marriage, the couple can proceed with a civil marriage, to be followed by the Blessing of the Marriage at a later date when the congregation can gather more freely.

Holy Matrimony

- Clergy are expected to meet all state and municipal requirements for these services. These include:
 - All marriage license requirements have been satisfied;
 - a minimum of 6 feet between individuals not in the same household;
 - cloth face coverings for all participants should be worn;
 - sanitization of any surfaces touched following the ceremony.
- Prior to the service, the officiant should be satisfied that no participant is or recently has been ill and that none have been in contact with a COVID-19 carrier in the last two weeks.
- As described in [the Governor's Executive Order 148](#), distance must be maintained: "All attendees at the gathering are required to be six feet apart from other attendees at all times, excluding immediate family members, caretakers, household members, or romantic partners; . . . There may be no contact between

attendees, excluding immediate family members, caretakers, household members, or romantic partners . . .” (<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-148.pdf>)

- Clear markers should be in place to designate distance for each individual household group.
- Clergy should take care not to touch the hands of the couple at the “joining of the hands” but do so at a distance with an instruction instead. A hand may be extended towards the couple, if desired.
- Blessing of rings or other symbols of the vows should happen at a distance; the couple should be in possession of the rings prior to exchanging them, rather than handing them back and forth to the priest.
- The Blessing of the Marriage is given without laying hands on the couple, but with some other sign of blessing (such as the sign of the cross, or one or both hands extended towards the couple).
- The NJ marriage certificate and the parish register require signatures from the couple, the witnesses, and the officiant. This should be accomplished with no in-person proximity or shared writing instrument. NJ Executive Order 135, p. 7 (2.b.iii-iv) describes a way to do this:

“iii. Each member of the couple and each witness shall sign the marriage or civil union certificate. To the extent that the members of the couple and/or witnesses are physically located in the same place, they shall sign the document in the physical presence of the other(s). If one or more of the individuals is located in a different physical location, once signatures are obtained in one location, the couple or each witness shall transmit a legible copy of the document, to the next signatory, until all signatures are obtained; and

iv. Once the certificate has been signed by both members of the couple and both witnesses, the last signatory shall transmit a legible copy of the signed certificate to the officiant at the conclusion of the conference, who shall sign the document on the date of transmission.”

(<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-135.pdf>).

- Masks should remain on throughout the ceremony.
 - The officiating clergyperson is expected to keep a mask or cloth face covering on throughout the service. The officiant should not remove the mask for preaching, reading, or leading the prayers. All those present should abide by the urging of [the Governor’s Executive Order 148](#) to wear face coverings as well:

“All individuals at the gathering should wear face coverings at all times where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, in accordance with CDC recommendations, except where doing so would inhibit the individual’s health or where the individual is under two years of age, and they must wear such face coverings where required by another

Executive Order.”

(<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-148.pdf>)

- One exception: the couple may briefly remove their masks, with everyone else maintaining distance, to greet each other at the Peace (the kiss).
- Live singing with any number of singers should not be used in this service. Recorded music may be used or live instrumental music (non-wind instruments).
- Holy Communion is not an option for this service at this time.

Burial Office

- Clergy are expected to meet all state and municipal requirements for these services. That includes:
 - a minimum of 6 feet between individuals not in the same household;
 - cloth face coverings for all participants should be worn;
 - sanitization of any surfaces touched following the ceremony.
- Prior to the service, the officiant should be satisfied that no participant is or recently has been ill and that none have been in contact with a COVID-19 carrier in the last two weeks.
- As described in [the Governor's Executive Order 148](#), distance must be maintained:

“All attendees at the gathering are required to be six feet apart from other attendees at all times, excluding immediate family members, caretakers, household members, or romantic partners; . . . There may be no contact between attendees, excluding immediate family members, caretakers, household members, or romantic partners . . .” (<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-148.pdf>)

 - Clear markers should be in place to designate distance for each individual household group.
 - The impulse to offer consolation and support for those grieving must be without contact and from a distance.
- Masks should remain on throughout the ceremony.
 - The officiating clergy person is expected to keep a mask or cloth face covering on throughout the service. The officiant should not remove the mask for preaching, reading, or leading the prayers. All those present should abide by the urging of [the Governor's Executive Order 148](#) to wear face coverings as well:

“All individuals at the gathering should wear face coverings at all times where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, in accordance with CDC recommendations, except where doing so would inhibit the individual's health or where the individual is under two years of age, and they must wear such face coverings where required by another Executive Order.”

(<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-148.pdf>)

- Live singing with any number of singers should not be used in this service. Recorded music may be used or live instrumental music (non-wind instruments).
- Holy Communion is not an option for this service at this time.

Some helpful additional materials:

On Distancing – 6 feet is a minimum; farther is better

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/victoriaforster/2020/04/20/is-6-feet-apart-really-enough-physical-distancing-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>

CDC guidance on using face coverings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

On singing in worship: Peter Elliott, “On Not Singing the Lord’s Song,” *Anglican Journal*.

<https://www.anglicanjournal.com/on-not-singing-the-lords-song/>

Suggestions for additions or revisions to this customary may be sent to the Canon to the Ordinary, Andrew Wright at awright@dioceseofnewark.org.