**PETITION OF EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH, MIDDLEBURG, VA**

**FOR PERMISSION TO HOLD INDOOR WORSHIP SERVICES**

**September 28, 2020**

Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Middleburg, Virginia, hereby seeks permission from the Diocese of Virginia to hold indoor worship services. We have completed the Parish Checklist for Petition for Phase Two and believe that we are prepared to safely conduct worship indoors in compliance with state, local and diocesan requirements.

Emmanuel earlier received permission from the Bishop on July 9, 2020 to conduct outdoor worship services at 9:00 on Sunday mornings in our rear parking lot. Those services have been held weekly since July 12, with an average attendance of 20 parishioners. As colder weather approaches, we know the time will come when it will no longer be comfortable to worship outside. We accordingly have developed a plan to move our service indoors, pending Diocesan permission.

Emmanuel is a small parish with roughly 88 member households, located in the historic town of Middleburg in Western Loudoun County, Virginia. Many of our parishioners are over 65, and we assume that many parishioners may have underlying conditions that increase their risk of serious adverse symptoms should they contract COVID-19.

Our small church building dates to 1842. It has been expanded and improved over the years to include, among other amenities, modern lighting and an updated heating and cooling system. Church property also includes a fairly substantial parish house, which was extensively renovated and expanded in 2005. Both the church and the parish house are cleaned weekly by an independent cleaning crew.

At present, we are concerned about holding indoor worship services in the church for several reasons, including challenges with ventilation and entering and exiting the building while maintaining social distancing. As an older parish, we are very mindful that we must do everything we can to reduce risk as we seek to regather indoors. If granted permission to do so, we plan to conduct worship services in the hall of the parish house for the time being, which is relatively new construction with superior ventilation and easy entry and exit.

We currently anticipate that we will hold only one service on Sunday morning in the parish hall. We will continue to make available our weekly online morning prayer service (available after 10:30 a.m. every Sunday morning) and our weekly online evening prayer service (available after 5:30 p.m. every Wednesday evening).

**Attributes of Physical Space.**

Emmanuel’s parish hall measures 70 feet by 50 feet. It has two entry points: an interior door and an exterior door that exits from the side of the building. A hallway from the front entrance of the parish house leads to the hall’s interior door.

The parish hall has a modern HVAC system that was installed when the building was renovated in 2005 and upgraded after a hailstorm in 2016. The hall also has windows that can readily be opened on three of its four sides. Both the exterior door and the interior door can be propped open as well. It is our current intention to open 2-3 windows for cross ventilation and prop open both doors for the duration of our worship services to help improve air exchange in the room.

Our Facilities Manager has determined that the parish hall can accommodate 17 groups of 2 worshippers from the same household sitting side-by-side while maintaining a physical distance of at least 6’ between all other participants in the worship service, for a maximum of 34 worshippers. This seating arrangement will also safely accommodate our rector and our music director. Once the seats have been arranged, they will be numbered so that ushers can direct worshippers to specific seats as they enter the hall for worship.

At present, the State of Virginia and Loudoun County authorities permit gatherings of up to 50 persons (50% capacity of a normal maximum occupancy of 100) in the parish hall.

**Health and Safety Procedures.**

The attached checklist spells out the detailed steps that we will be taking to clean and disinfect the hall before and after our worship services, to guide worshippers safely into and out of the hall, and to ensure that worshippers follow the Diocesan required health and safety procedures.

We have also developed training materials for our ushers, since they will play a critical role in ensuring that these procedures are diligently followed. A copy of those training materials is attached.

Our Junior Warden is overseeing the acquisition and replenishment of sufficient supplies of cleaning and disinfection materials and disposable masks.

**Communications Plans.**

Since the pandemic began, we have been using our weekly email newsletter, The Messenger, to inform the parish about COVID-19 related developments. The Messenger is distributed late in the week to more than 100 households. Details about our worship services (outdoor and online) are routinely provided via The Messenger. In addition, our Parish Secretary distributes service-specific information via parish-wide email blasts every week. We will continue to use these methods to keep parishioners up to date on our plans and requirements for indoor worship services.

In addition, our Facilities Manager is ensuring that the signage required in our attached checklist is appropriately displayed around the parish house and the church. We also record the attendees at each of our in-person worship services so that we may contact them in the event anyone attending a service is diagnosed with COVID-19.