Parish Policy: Safe Worship, Accessibility & Emergency Evacuation

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Port Royal

Oct 20, 2026 · @Jane

1. Purpose and Scope

All baptized persons are welcome at the Lord's Table, and everyone who worships at St. Mark's should be able to receive communion with dignity and leave the building safely in an emergency. Both goals depend on the same things: clear aisles, sensible seating, and people who know what to do.

This policy applies to everyone at worship. Sections 2–4 apply especially to anyone who uses a walker, cane, wheelchair, or other mobility aid, whether short or long term.

2. Clear Aisles and Mobility Aids

The center aisle, the side aisles, and both exits are egress routes and must stay clear at all times during worship. This is required by fire code and is the single most important part of this plan.

- Walkers, wheelchairs, and other equipment may not be left in any aisle or any egress route.
- Everyone who uses a mobility aid should keep it with them throughout the service, so they can exit quickly in an emergency.
- Ushers welcome and guide the congregation. They are not available to carry, move, or deliver mobility aids during the service.
- People using mobility aids should sit in the designated accessible seating (Section 3), where chairs are removed so the aid can stay beside them.
- Anyone who prefers not to manage a mobility aid during communion may receive communion in place (Section 4).

3. Designated Accessible Seating

Seating for people with mobility aids, or anyone who may need help in an emergency, is located opposite the choir in the short rows. Chairs will be removed as needed so every walker and wheelchair can stay beside its owner without blocking the aisle.

- Anyone who wishes to walk to the altar with a mobility aid is asked to sit here.
- Anyone who needs the ramp to enter the building should sit near the front, so they can exit easily in an emergency.
- Anyone who anticipates needing help to evacuate is encouraged to sit here, in a center-facing pew, or in the first row of forward-facing pews.
- If you may need help in an emergency, identify someone nearby who can be counted on to assist you. Ushers can help arrange this before the service.

4. Receiving Communion

Receiving in place. Anyone who prefers not to walk to the altar may receive communion where they are seated. A priest, deacon, or Eucharistic Visitor will bring the sacrament to them. This is a normal and honored way of receiving.

Walking forward. A communicant who wishes to walk forward may do so from the designated accessible seating, using their own mobility aid. For safety, communicants are asked not to be steadied or led by another person while walking to the altar. Anyone who needs that kind of help should receive it in place.

5. Emergency Exit Routes and Assembly Point

Who	Exit
Center-facing pews and altar participants	Side door to the ramp. Because of the ramp's width, it is for exiting traffic only.
Forward-facing pews	Main door at the rear of the church

- If either exit backs up or is blocked by fire, use the other exit.
- Leave calmly and in an orderly way, without talking, so emergency instructions can be heard.
- Gather on the church green next to the Center. Take care crossing Paris Avenue and watch for fire trucks traveling it to reach the church.

6. Helping Those Who Cannot Evacuate on Their Own

- Able persons sitting nearby should help those who need assistance.
- Anyone who uses a mobility aid should exit with it. Aids are kept beside their owners during worship for exactly this reason.
- Everyone who does not need help and is not helping someone should leave quickly, so the exits are clear for those who need more time.

7. Accounting for Everyone

- Ushers take a count of the congregation early in the service and update it for latecomers.
- Notice who is on your pew. After an evacuation, try to find them and report anyone missing to the Rector, the VPOD, or an usher.
- Let someone know you are safe: hand your nametag to the VPOD or an usher, or make sure your name is recorded at the assembly point.

8. Emergency Roles

Calling 911. The VPOD for the service is primarily responsible for calling 911. Ushers and other vestry members present should call if they are not certain the call has been made.

Other support. Ushers and vestry members should also be ready to help people cross Paris Avenue and to record the names of those who have evacuated.

9. Pastoral Discretion, Contacts, and Review

Pastoral discretion. The Rector may make reasonable accommodations in individual circumstances and will always work with any parishioner who has concerns about this policy. Accommodations may not block an aisle or egress route.

Contacts. The Rector and Wardens can answer questions about this policy or explain duties under it.

Review. This policy takes effect November 1, 2026. The vestry will review it after three months to see whether it is working well for the whole parish.