

A photograph of empty wooden church pews, viewed from a low angle looking down the aisle. The pews are made of light-colored wood and have small numbers (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13) on the backrests. A vibrant rainbow light gradient is applied across the entire image, transitioning from blue on the left to red in the center and back to blue on the right.

Considerations and Checklist for Church Re-Openings

CLERGY RESPONSE
NETWORK

Re-Opening the Church Doors after COVID-19

As time moves forward many places of worship are contemplating resuming worship services in the midst of COVID-19. The Clergy Response Network (CRN) felt a sense of responsibility to research and find strategies that will allow you to resume worship activities in an informed and safe manner.

CRN an interfaith collaborative mobilizing faith leaders and faith-based institutions to build a healthy urban community through education, advocacy and partnership development.

As our churches reopen, we encourage you to **consider** these guidelines. Please note, the Clergy Response Network (CRN) is not a public health entity. The recommendations noted in this document were created with the CRN and health service partners to serve as a guide to assist you in re-opening your church doors once it has been determined that it is safe to do so COVID-19.

Know the Risk Factors for COVID-19: Who is Most at Risk?

Knowing who is at risk for COVID-19 can help your church make decisions on staffing and Volunteers, and on whether you will return sooner or later. For example, those with preexisting conditions and those over 65 years old are at a greater risk for experiencing worse symptoms than others if they contract the virus. Other COVID-19 risk factors include:

- diabetes
- chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- serious heart conditions
- severe obesity (body mass index or BMI of 40 or higher)
- chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- liver disease
- pregnancy
- immunocompromised conditions including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications

If high risk members are in roles of service to the church that increase their direct contact with church members and persons in the community (e.g., Ushers, Choir, Deaconess, Sunday school Teachers, food pantry), they should be moved to roles that put them in less contact with others (e.g., making calls, leading virtual Sunday school class or bible study).

Also, be in constant communication with your members to determine which individuals or families have been infected with or exposed to COVID-19. This might cause you to reconsider opening your church doors.

Know that there is no rush to return to the building. You can continue doing online services or drive-in church if you don't believe your church is ready to open or if your members are experiencing anxiety and fear about returning to the church building. Another idea to gauge the readiness of your congregants to return to church is to conduct a poll to understand if they are ready to return to the church building.

Checklists

Prepare Your Church Building Prior to Church Services

- Deep clean your entire church. Think about areas where germs can be easily transferred. Consider sanitizing:
 - carpets (deep shampoo)
 - pews/chairs/cushions
 - bathrooms
 - doorknobs
 - light switches and wall plates
 - microphones and stands
 - counters
- Use chemicals and disinfectants, as directed, and allow for the proper drying times. Here is a list of approved disinfectants for COVID-19.
 - **CDC's recommend disinfectant mixture.** Prepare a bleach solution by mixing 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water. Spray bleach mixture on surfaces and let it stand **for at least 1 minute before wiping dry**. Important note for bleach mixtures: bleach solutions will be effective for disinfection up to 24 hours.
 - Alcohol is best to keep electronic equipment cleaned. Use alcohol solutions with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol alcohol.
- Pay attention to the preschool and children's areas. Consider removing all nonessential items from the room to limit surfaces from potential contamination. Do a thorough cleaning between use of these spaces. Please see the preschool/ children section for more information to consider.
- Temporarily remove bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc., from the backs of chairs and pews.
- Post signs about not shaking hands and on how to do non-contact greetings. You can promote the hashtag #itsoktosmileandwave. Also, check out some of the signs your church can get online:
<https://outreach.com/blog/the-latest-trends-in-welcome-back-tools/>
<https://www.mysafetysign.com> (type, "social distancing" in search bar)
- Remind congregants to wear masks in church at all times. Many members may not have masks, so providing masks will be an important role for the church. There are organizations that are willing to provide assistance in supplying churches with masks and by training church members on how to make masks. Please check out these resources:
 - The Sewing Labs provides free kits
<https://thesewinglabs.community/the-mask-project-2020/picking-up-kits-for-masks.html>
 - Micah's Boutique: 816-665-2380 (contact Andrea Carnes)
 - Calvary Community Outreach Network (816-531-4683) will provide limited masks upon request.
- Consider placing brightly colored tape, highly visible stickers, and/or signage in your sanctuary or classrooms to ensure the 6 feet social distancing recommendations from CDC are clearly marked. Consider using tape on pews, like an "X" for where a member should sit or a line of 6-foot tape to show the distance that people should sit apart from each other. You can also remove chairs, use cones, etc. to indicate the distance needed. If your people are from the same household, they can be permitted to sit together. However, if family members, like grandparents, live in a different house, then they should not sit together.
- Tell your congregation through text messaging (see text messaging list), flyers on the doors, email, and social media about how the church has been prepared for their arrival. Be sure to use the words "clean, safe, and mindful of health needs in preparation for a non-touch experience" or something similar. **Also, say that if they are sick, then they should not attend church services in-person, and encourage them to join online instead.**

Consider Sunday Service Times and Locations

- Keep an online meeting option for those who are concerned or unable to attend church service in-person. Many churches have seen a spike in engagement since their online presence has increased. Build on this!
- Offer multiple services to increase opportunities for social distancing. One way to ensure your services are evenly spread out is to have people sign up for a service. You can use Facebook events and have people mark which service they'll attend.
- Remember that if you have multiple services, you will need to clean between each service, which could be an added task for deacons, ushers, or other volunteer church members. Another thought is to shorten the service time in order to have more time to clean thoroughly between services. Some churches are moving to having multiple services during the week to allow for cleaning between services.
- Consider having "drive-in" church services. You can use your parking lot to allow members worship together while staying in their cars. They can tune into your church's live streaming or you can use your audio equipment outside to ensure everyone can hear the message live. Be sure to have a bathroom available for members to use and to have Volunteers to keep bathrooms sanitized between users.
- Determine how many Volunteers you have available to assist. Limit Volunteers to those who do not have preexisting conditions, are under 65 years old, and persons who do not have other COVID-19 risk factors.

Prepare for Worship Services

- Celebrate the return! Consider planning a "Comeback Service". Encourage praise, provide times of testimony, and a sermon that spurs people to embrace life changes God has revealed to them during the stay home order. Consider doing this outside as a first phase. Possibly, have a church tailgate service with outdoor microphones and speakers while still maintaining social distancing.
- Avoid passing microphones on the stage.
- Remember to avoid handing out bulletins, and instead project all announcements on screens. Also, do not allow people to come by and pick up bulletins out of stacks. Consider having members update their phone numbers for the church registry in order to text a link to an online bulletin. Also use text messages to send out important information as re-opening guidelines change.
- Change the way you offer communion. Avoid passing a plate or bowl. LifeWay.com is one resource that offers combined elements of communion that can be picked up as people enter, but make sure that people are not picking from a deep bowl.
- Continue offering online giving options. Have stations in the church where people can drop offerings instead of passing a plate. Have gloves and masks available for ministry leaders counting money.
- Come up with a fun way to greet others in a no-contact way. Consider posting new signage at the church entry. Take time during praise and worship to have the senior pastor role model fun, non-contact greetings before service begins. Encourage congregants to practice Wakanda salutes, foot bumps, and head nods. These activities could be folded into the "Comeback Service".
- Clean the pulpit after every service.
- Consider dismissing in an orderly manner to ensure there is social distancing. Possibly say something like, "Just like when it's time for Sunday after service dinner when we invite you to the buffet one table at a time, when we dismiss today, we will dismiss a few pews at a time to maintain social distancing, starting with...."

• Also consider asking members entering the church building to complete a short COVID-19 Symptom Checklist to determine if they okay to enter:

- Have you experienced any of the following respiratory symptoms?

- Cough
- Shortness of breath

OR at least TWO of these symptoms

- Fever
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- Vomiting

Are you a healthcare provider? If yes, do you work in facilities with recognized COVID-19 cases?

If **YES**, to any of these questions, they should not enter the church building.

Prepare Staff, Ushers, Volunteers

- Enlist ushers to be both inside and outside Greeters. Instruct them on how to greet members safely: NO hand shaking or hugs.
- Ensure doors are propped open or have the Greeters hold them open to deter members from opening doors.
- Greeters and Volunteers should be able to answer questions on stay safe procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Train them beforehand, if possible.
- Consider setting a limit to the number of people who can be allowed in the bathroom at a time. Mark the floor with tape or stickers to note 6 feet of social distancing for persons who may have to stand in line while waiting to get in the bathroom. Also, consider having Greeters monitor the bathrooms to ensure hands are washed and social distancing is followed.
- Consider requiring a temperature check and ask all “COVID-19 Symptom Checklist” questions above with all Staff, Ushers, Greeters, and other Volunteers.
- Have Ushers place hand sanitizers in places where they can be easily accessed as congregants enter and leave the sanctuary and other fellowship spaces.

Prepare Media and Technology Team Members

- Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, etc. after every use. Keep a record of when each item was cleaned. DO NOT use water. Rubbing alcohol or alcohol-based cleaners are best.
- Rotate your media and tech team if possible. Again, encourage those who feel sick or run down to not come into the church building.
- Keep using your online services. Facebook may be more accessible since many people have accounts, but consider other options like YouTube for those who’d like to watch on their smart TVs.
- Add COVID-19 social distancing and church building rules on church projection screens, if you haven’t already.

Prepare Choirs, Praise Teams, and Bands

- For Praise Teams and Choir, do not use the full Team or Choir. Consider rotations. Space members out appropriately. Consider using a diamond pattern with six feet of spacing between members. Assign microphones and use the same one every time, if possible. If not, consider asking those handling microphones to wear gloves and to not put their mouths on microphones.
- Consider not using choir robes, as space for robe changing may be limited. Just as healthcare workers change or wash their coats after each use, so should the robes be washed.
- Wipe down music stands after each use.
- Dismiss Choir members in a manner to allow social distancing. Consider eliminating the Choir until COVID-19 is no longer a problem. Keep choir and praise team members at the recommended 6 feet apart.
- Keep hand sanitizer in choir stand, on pulpit, etc.

Prepare for Pre-school and Children's Church

- Consider not opening preschool and children classes/areas on the first Sunday back. Some churches are choosing to re-open the preschool and children areas when schools are open.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children 2 years of age and under do not wear masks or face coverings. Please keep this in mind as you make decisions.
- Here is a good rule of thumb: If you wear a mask, it's too soon to have your preschool and children areas open.
- Pre-register children to limit how many are in any room at a time. Some churches are starting with a 5-child limit in each room at first, if space allows. If space does not allow, then consider not opening preschool or children's church for now.
- Limit leaders in the preschool and children's areas to those who do not have pre-existing conditions. Also limit leaders to those under 65 years old and without chronic diseases that could make them vulnerable to the virus.
- Have extra Volunteers to help in the preschool ministry where some children may suffer from separation anxiety after being with parents for a long time.
- Have only one person handle child check-in stations, and do not pass the check-in device.
- Do not let parents into the children's area. Instead have parents drop them off at the welcome desk or a makeshift welcome area.
- Have a checklist of what's been cleaned and when it was cleaned in each room.
- Develop a list of procedures for your Volunteers. Train them on this list through a virtual meeting platform, like Zoom or Webex, prior to the first meeting.

Prepare for Sunday School and Small Group Worship

- Consider reducing your groups to maintain the social distancing standards. You can also allow small groups to use the church on different days/nights if you choose to meet in-person.
- If you do have class, please know you should clean the doorknobs, water fountains, and other high traffic areas between uses.

- Have a plan for your leaders and teachers. Will they discuss what God revealed to them during the stay home order? Will you allow time to grieve for loved ones who were lost during the stay home order? Will you encourage a prayer and praise time?
- If you don't have class, make sure you have provided an outline for your teachers and leaders to continue engagement with your groups. This is still an excellent time to build classes and community.

Prepare Amenities: Coffee, Bulletins and Hand Sanitizer

- Restrooms: You must decide whether you will allow bathroom usage at this time. If you don't think you have enough Volunteers to maintain ongoing bathroom cleaning during services or other church events, then it may not be time to return to the building.
- If you choose to keep your restrooms open, be sure to post signs about washing hands in bathrooms with appropriate guidelines to doing so. Also, assign an Usher, other Ministry Leader, or Volunteer to monitor bathroom traffic to help maintain social distancing.
- Do not have coffee stations, donuts, or groups meals at this time. You can stay attuned to the guidelines to know when it is best to reintroduce these services.
- Have hand sanitizer available throughout the church. Consider if you should meet in-person if your church doesn't have enough hand sanitizer for members to use.
- Supply masks for those without one to increase comfort levels. Again, these may be difficult to obtain, but you could have people make masks as a service to the church or seek out community resources available to assist churches in having masks available for their members.

It is our hope that this document provides you with enough information to plan responsibly for your return to worship.

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