

Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return¹

Initial Questions

1. How many people in your community are in the at-risk categories? How does that impact your planning? Have you consulted your insurance carrier regarding liability?
2. How will you communicate clearly that deciding to stay home is an appropriate and respected decision?
3. How will you accommodate worshipers safely using social distancing? Will you screen worshipers for infection? How will that happen? How will you enforce maximum occupancies of 25% or less of capacity? What is the air circulation situation in your building/sanctuary?
4. Is a simple majority decision by the session enough to move forward with re-opening the building and resuming in-person programming? How would you deal with a significant minority in opposition?
5. What plans will you have in place if the pastor or a member of the church tests positive for COVID-19 after you begin gathering?
6. How will you implement CDC protocols for hygiene and building disinfection?²
7. How will you be intentional and gradual about adding activities according to your congregation's ability to maintain Covid-19 related precautions?

Worship

What plans will you have in place for gatherings of up to 10 people? 25 people? 50 people? 100 people?

1. Masks are required to be worn. What will you do if someone arrives without a mask?
2. Every-other row (or two rows, if needed) roped off.
3. Tape on pews / chairs to indicate where to sit in order to maintain social distancing.
4. Multiple services, even in smaller congregations, or dividing the attendance into appropriately sized groups that are assigned Sundays to attend in person.

¹ Adapted from Ken Braddy, "24 Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return," <https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

5. Doors and windows remain open for the entire gathering, even in inclement weather, with gloved volunteers stationed at all doors.
6. Continue virtual worship.
7. No printed bulletins: use PowerPoint if available or have liturgist “call out” the service. Email bulletins in advance and invite people to print their own or bring them on mobile devices.
8. What adjustments will you make to the Lord’s Supper, baptisms, and your choir ministry? Are these elements essential to worship if they increase the risk to those who have gathered? If the session decides to include any of these elements, what precautions will be taken to minimize risk?

How will you conduct the Lord’s Supper?

1. No passing plates, no intinction in common cup.
2. Bread and cup that are broken and poured are symbolic only, not used to serve the people.
3. Provide pre-packaged communion packs; or process to serving stations using social distancing (How will this be arranged?) Communion servers provide individual pieces of bread with tongs or while wearing gloves; only the servers touch the bread. The cup is given with disposable, individualized, plastic glasses spaced

How will you perform baptisms?

1. Have parents/guardian hold the child and distribute the water.
2. Pastor proclaims the Trinitarian formula as the parents apply the water to the baptized.
3. Extended family is not invited forward so the number of people at the font are limited.

How will you provide choral ministry?

1. Begin with solos or household-only groups.
2. Introduce quartets and small ensembles that allow for social distancing.
3. Keep singers further distanced than six feet (10-12 feet minimum) from congregants because of the greater risk of projecting particulates while singing.

Christian Education

What are the risks associated with offering children's church?

1. Can you assure families that children will be protected while in a separate and usually smaller space?
2. Is this an opportunity to explore multi-generational worship in order to ensure the health and well-being of everyone in the congregation?

What's your plan for Sunday School curriculum?

1. Utilize online resources or distribute PDF versions of curriculum, especially for children.
2. Distribute PDF materials and/or links to Facebook, YouTube, or other online links to youth and adults. Schedule online opportunities for Christian education for all age groups.

Are you canceling camps and VBS, or delaying them until later this summer?

1. Consider virtual opportunities to offer this programming.
2. Let the health and well-being of volunteers, visitors, and children guide decisions around delaying or canceling group activities that usually have a lot of interaction. For instance, how do you have a Vacation Bible School craft station where each child only touches the craft supplies they need and everyone is practicing social distancing?
3. Plan for next year with the understanding that we may still need to be asking these questions.

Are you going to host other activities, meals, or special events?

1. Should be conducted using the CDC guidelines for attendance capacity (e.g. 10+, 50+, 100+) and conform to the same rubrics for best practices (e.g. wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, etc.) as are followed for a worship service.
2. If the guidelines or rubrics cannot be followed, events should be cancelled.

What are you going to do about larger group gatherings?

1. Larger group gatherings should continue to be held virtually until guidance from the CDC shows that such gatherings would not contribute to a spike in infections.
2. When larger gatherings are deemed advisable by the CDC, consider moving them into a larger space such as the fellowship hall.

Fellowship and Pastoral Care

Are you continuing to provide coffee hour? What about fellowship time before and after services?

1. Are these elements essential to the community if they increase the risk to those who have gathered?
2. If the session decides to include any of these elements, what precautions will be taken to minimize risk?
3. If included, all coffee stations should be serviced by a volunteer with mask and gloves: no self-serve stations for drinks or food should be allowed.
4. Only individually wrapped food items that are distributed by a volunteer with mask and gloves should be allowed.
5. Tables should be spaced out to maintain social distancing and the number of chairs per table minimized / limited.
6. Special attention should be taken to sanitizing and sterilizing any area where people gather to eat and drink both before and after the gathering.

How will you deal with the rise of COVID-19 related addictions or domestic violence?

1. Pastors should discuss openly the reality of addictions, inviting concerned members to discuss confidentially and seek an appropriate referral to a mental health provider.