

## SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDANCE REGARDING PHASED REOPENING OF CHURCHES

Presbytery of Lake Huron

May 13, 2020

To the Sessions, Congregations, and Pastoral Leaders of the Presbytery,

We send you this letter to update and clarify the advice in our previous correspondence, and to provide a succinct framework for resuming face-to-face gatherings. Specifically, we hope to equip and support our sessions and pastoral leaders as you make decisions in your unique contexts, knowing that you are assessing the needs of your particular congregation and discerning your own path forward.

On April 28, the Presbytery Council published [preliminary guidance](#) regarding the phased reopening of churches for face-to-face gatherings, including public worship. Based on the directives issued by the governor, as well as the best public health and church guidelines, the Council also issued [benchmarks and protocols](#) for a phased return. At that time, we projected Pentecost, May 31, as a target date to resume face-to-face gatherings including in-person worship ***“with limited numbers of participants under carefully observed protocols should circumstances permit.”***

The three tables below place the “Opening Up America Guidelines” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The White House next to the Presbytery’s specific recommendations as they relate to returning to our church buildings.

The decision as to when to resume face-to-face gatherings belongs to the Session. The May 31 target date to enter Phase 1 should be regarded as a best-case scenario, and by no means as a directive or expectation. Indeed, for most churches, in-person worship should not resume until Phases 2 or 3, using the benchmarks and protocols below (or in our [expanded advice](#)). Under no circumstances should churches resume in-person gatherings before state and local public health officials indicate that the incidence of infections, as well as adequate testing and treatment resources, make it safer to do so. In addition, sessions should consult with their insurance carriers regarding restrictions, waivers, and other matters that may affect your decision to meet.

As we approach Pentecost and navigate these COVID-19 waters together, we are reminded of our hope, expressed in the images of water and fire from Isaiah 43:

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.*

Faithfully,

The Presbytery Council of the Presbytery of Lake Huron

**A FRAMEWORK FOR RESUMING IN-PERSON GATHERINGS**  
Based on CDC *Opening Up America* and other resources

<b>Phase One – beginning May 28 or when current stay-at-home order is eased</b>	
<b>Opening Up America Guidelines</b>	<b>Presbytery of Lake Huron Guidance</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place</li> <li>• <b>No more than 10 people</b> should gather and should maintain 6 feet of social distancing</li> <li>• Continue telework, if possible, return to work in phases</li> <li>• Close common areas where people are likely to congregate and interact</li> <li>• Visits to hospitals and senior care facilities should be prohibited</li> <li>• Schools, day care, and organized youth activities should remain closed</li> <li>• Large venues, including places of worship can operate under <b>strict social distancing protocols</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches should continue holding virtual worship services only</li> <li>• Worship leaders may consider resuming recording/ broadcasting from the sanctuary maintaining and modeling 6 feet of social distancing.</li> <li>• High-risk individuals, including staff, should continue to shelter-in-place</li> <li>• Small groups, Bible studies, pastoral care groups, etc. should continue to function in a virtual format</li> <li>• Weddings and memorial services should be kept to fewer than 10 in attendance, maintaining social distance guidelines and wearing masks</li> </ul>

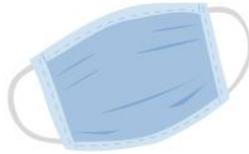
<b>Phase Two – beginning when public health officials indicate criteria have been met</b>	
<b>Opening Up America Guidelines</b>	<b>Presbytery of Lake Huron Guidance</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place</li> <li>• No more than 50 people should gather and maintain 6 feet of social distancing</li> <li>• Encourage telework if possible</li> <li>• Close common areas where people are likely to congregate and interact</li> <li>• Non-essential travel can resume</li> <li>• Visits to hospitals and senior care facilities should be prohibited</li> <li>• Schools, and organized youth activities can resume maintaining social distancing guidelines</li> <li>• Large venues, including places of worship can operate under <b>moderate</b> social distancing protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches should continue offering virtual worship services</li> <li>• Churches may consider hosting in-person worship for up to 50 people, maintaining social distancing guidelines and requiring facemasks for all people, including worship leaders               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use no-touch alternatives for passing peace, collecting and counting offering</li> <li>○ Have a strategy to ensure compliance and prepare for sanitation</li> <li>○ No choral or congregational singing</li> <li>○ Have no-transmission communion strategy</li> <li>○ Track attendance and have a notification strategy in case a worshiper becomes infected</li> <li>○ No childcare, nursery, or children’s church</li> <li>○ See additional guidance in infographic</li> </ul> </li> <li>• High-risk individuals, including staff, should continue to shelter-in-place</li> <li>• Church staff may resume working in the church office maintaining physical distancing guidelines and wearing masks</li> <li>• Small groups, Bible studies, meetings, etc. may resume meeting in-person maintaining physical distancing guidelines and wearing masks</li> <li>• Encourage continued virtual pastoral care; any in-person pastoral visits need to maintain social distancing, wear masks, and if possible, occur outside</li> <li>• Weddings and memorial services should be kept to less than 50 in attendance, maintaining social distancing guidelines, and wearing masks (including officiants)</li> </ul>

<b>Phase Three – beginning when public health officials indicate criteria have been met</b>	
<b>Opening Up America Guidelines</b>	<b>Presbytery of Lake Huron Guidance</b>
<b><i>The transition from Phase Two to Phase Three is significant; we encourage churches to adopt a roll-out strategy that meets the particular needs and circumstances of each congregation</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should maintain social distancing</li> <li>• Visits to senior care facilities and hospitals can resume</li> <li>• Large venues, including places of worship can operate under limited social distancing protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches may worship in person and may continue virtual opportunities</li> <li>• Participants – including worship leaders – should wear cloth masks at church and in community ministry</li> <li>• Until there is a breakthrough regarding a vaccine, we encourage churches to model safe and healthy behaviors, using the recommendations in Phase Two</li> </ul>

***Additional resources and guidance may be found on the Coronavirus Resource page at [www.presbylh.org/covid-19](http://www.presbylh.org/covid-19)***



# COVID-19 PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES



## FACE MASKS

Returning to worship will require the wearing of masks for all three phases of Opening Up America. Request that members supply their own masks and have masks available for your community to help members who do not have access to a mask comply with regulations.

## HAND SANITIZER

Access to soap and hand sanitizer will be crucial to preventing viral spread as worshippers reenter the building. Purchase or collect hand sanitizer for your community and strategize about location, accessibility, and administration of your hand sanitizing stations.



## INFRARED FOREHEAD THERMOMETERS

In order to reduce transmission, members and visitors with a temperature of 100.4°F/38°C or higher should NOT attend worship. Purchase Infrared Forehead Thermometers that can be used as people enter worship.

## SETTING UP YOUR SPACE

- Have a plan for maintaining 6 feet of physical distancing for entry, worship, and exiting with instructional signage.
- Remove Bibles, hymnals, offering envelopes, etc.
- Consider adding a screen or TV monitor into your worship space, do not use paper bulletins.
- Open all doors to eliminate transmission via doorknobs.
- Have a strategy in place for sanitizing before and after worship (i.e. pews, railings, doorknobs, microphones, etc).



## ATTENDANCE & REPORTING

Create a process for reporting to your local health department and for notifying worship participants in case a member of your faith community contracts COVID-19. Consider opening a Google Voice phone number so participants can text you as a way to log attendance or have an allocated person collecting names as people arrive.

## MANAGING MEMBER EXPECTATIONS

- In the weeks leading up to returning to your building, be sure to contact your members with specific guidelines of what to expect.
- Everyone, including pastors and worship leaders, will be wearing masks.
- Congregational song will not be a part of the in-person service.
- The offering plate will not be passed; consider other alternatives for giving.
- High-risk members (65+) are asked to continue worshipping virtually.
- There will be no fellowship hour before or after worship.
- Consider how you will welcome and communicate with visitors.

"PREPARE YOUR WORK OUTSIDE;  
GET EVERYTHING READY FOR YOURSELF IN THE FIELD,  
AND AFTER THAT BUILD YOUR HOUSE."  
-PROVERBS 24:27

CREATED MAY 12, 2020

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The COVID-19 Reopening to Reimagining Task Force of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta