



April 30, 2020

Guidelines for Returning to Local Church Sites

In addition to following the “Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis” from Governor Abbott, and guidelines from your local health officials, please form a team to address the following areas in the life of the church:

Worship

- Step through your order of worship and consider any worship practice that may spread the virus to another person. These practices include Holy Communion, Baptisms, “Passing the Peace,” registration of attendance, passing the plate for offering and benediction practices.
- Consider the health and safety of those who greet, usher, lead worship, preach, and sing in the choir or band. Be strategic in how and when your choir comes back for rehearsals.
- Decide ahead of time how you will inform people about worship seating requirements. If possible, direct people in one door and out another. Consider using painters tape to designate sections of seating that are 6 feet apart.
- If possible, eliminate the use of printed bulletins and utilize screens as much as possible.
- Determine if you will have door greeters holding doors open and if they should be wearing gloves and masks.
- Have hand-sanitizing stations at the entrance to worship.
- Consider how you will keep in compliance with government regulations around capacity limits. Will you turn people away if there are too many in attendance? Will you have an overflow room?
- For larger churches -consider offering more, smaller worship services?

Facilities

- Survey your entire building to determine which areas will be open and cleaned regularly. Determine if you will use one door for an entrance and one for an exit.
 - Provide a plan for cleaning all areas that are available to the public. How can/will you use volunteers to help make this happen? How will you train them?
 - Provide a plan for cleaning the sanctuary in between services. How can/will you use volunteers to help make this happen? How will you train them?

- Provide a cleaning plan for all Sunday School and small group classrooms after use. How can/will you use volunteers to help make this happen? How will you train them?
- Consider suspending food and beverage services and/or follow the guidelines provided by government for public health and safety.
- Work with the Preschool and other Day School groups to determine facility use policies during this time of crisis.
- How will building use be made available to outside groups in the coming weeks and months?
- Determine your policy around deciding to allow groups to use your space. Consider canceling rentals from children's events and wedding receptions that are harder to keep socially distanced.
- Determine your policy of refunds for children, youth and rental events.
- Consider posting hygiene and mask requirements, as well as social distance information, at entry locations. Clean door handles and/or prop open doors for easy access.

Programing

- Survey your programming calendar to determine health and safety risks.
 - Consider options that provide smaller gatherings, once a week meetings, online interaction and/or backyard small events.
 - Consider hosting local events rather than cross country choir or mission trips.
 - Consider postponing gathering that place people in close proximity to each other. This could include transporting people in church vans or buses.
 - Encourage high-risk individuals to continue to connect to small groups online. Consider new ways to provide lower risk Christian education.
 - Determine when the time is appropriate to offer nursery and children's ministry programming on Sunday mornings.
 - Consider holding events in large well-ventilated areas to allow for 6 ft. social-distancing.
 - Consider focusing on societal and congregational needs that are happening right now such as spiritual health, mental health and available social services
 - Consider your response to the rise of COVID-19 addictions.
 - Consider eliminating or decreasing any fellowship time between services.
 - Consider Wednesday night programming and when it might be appropriate to cancel it and if/how to modify it.

Pastoral Care

- Survey the usual pastoral care practice provided by the church and the added connections that are needed during this time.
 - What policies and practice will be implemented for memorial services and funerals?

- Consider how at-risk members will continue to stay connected to the church and pastor.
- What support services will be provided for those who are experiencing crisis?
- Encourage members to contact the pastor if the virus infects them. Consider how the pastor and church will offer pastoral care.

Administration

- Budget may need to be adjusted to reflect a down turn in giving.
- Make online giving available to members and guests.
- Attendance numbers may simply need to be estimates.
- Consider staff realignments and job descriptions to meet the present needs.
- Have a communications strategy so that the church members and guests know how you have planned for their health and safety.
- Consider what new digital equipment you might need to purchase.

Lastly, you may want to consider a soft gradual opening to give you and your volunteers some time to live into a new way of being. It is important to be intentional and as many innovation experts say, “Don’t waste a good crisis!” This is also the time to take a very good look at your church’s mission and vision. Don’t just go back to ministry as usual. Consider leaving behind some programs and ways of being that may be tired or unhealthy for your congregation. Look at some of your effective new ways of being and remember to maintain an outward focus. This crisis has certainly made church leaders more attentive, more intentional, and more outward focused. As Rev. Dr. Kevin Murriel, stated in a recent Webinar, “Many of our churches had to close for the church to open.” Thank you for your faithful leadership. May God surround you with wisdom and peace.

**Rev. Cammy Gaston
Director
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Please contact the Center for Leadership Development at the North Texas Conference if you have any questions or concerns and we will be happy to assist you.