

Phases in Re-Opening Church Buildings in Response to a Public Health Emergency

PHASE ONE

*No Live, In-Person Gatherings
(Stay-at-Home Orders,
Most Businesses and Institutions Closed)*

CONGREGATION PROTOCOLS UNDER PHASE ONE

- Congregations holding virtual worship, livestreamed or recorded
- Bible studies, coffee hours, social gatherings, and meetings via telephone or online
- Pastoral care via telephone or online
- Continued ministries of service and compassion within safety protocols
- First assessments of economic impact on members of the congregations and wider community-- preliminary adjustments of budgets, ministry goals

PHASE ONE Public Health Indicator:

PANDEMIC CASES, HOSPITALIZATIONS AND DEATHS ARE INCREASING

PHASE TWO

*Significantly Limited Gatherings
(Some Businesses and Institutions
Reopened with Limitations)*

CONGREGATION PROTOCOLS UNDER PHASE TWO

- Church offices may reopen in spaces large enough for physical distance to be maintained, with the requirement that proper sanitation measures be strictly adhered to and enforced
- Small indoor church worship (under 50 or number designated by civic authorities) may re-start in spaces large enough for 6 feet of physical distance to be maintained between people
- Outdoor worship for limited numbers with physical distancing
- Restrictive practices for celebrations of the Eucharist
- Small group gatherings permitted with physical distancing
- Continued health/safety protocols, including the use of masks at all gatherings.
- Ongoing care for the most vulnerable, engagement with those assessing the societal impact of the pandemic and advocacy for justice
- Next level assessment of pandemic's impact on members of the congregation and community. Forecasting of necessary long-term adjustments of ministry initiatives. Exploration of collaborative partnerships
- Virtual worship will still be necessary in all congregations to accommodate vulnerable populations and larger worshipping communities
- Pastoral care to those in high-risk categories for contracting the virus remains restricted, particularly for clergy and lay visitors in high- risk categories

PHASE TWO Public Health Indicators:

14-DAY CONSECUTIVE DECLINE IN NUMBERS OF POSITIVE TESTING FOR PANDEMIC ILLNESS, HOSPITALIZATIONS, AND INTENSIVE CARE BED USE

WIDESPREAD TESTING / CONTACT TRACING AVAILABLE TO TRACK THE SPREAD OF THE PANDEMIC ILLNESS

SUFFICIENT SUPPLY OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

EVIDENCE THAT OUR HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS HAVE SUFFICIENT EQUIPMENT AND ARE NOT OVERWHELMED BY THE NUMBER OF CASES

PHASE THREE

*Moderately Limited Gatherings
(More Businesses and Institutions
Reopened / Fewer Restrictions)*

CONGREGATION PROTOCOLS WITH GUIDELINES UNDER PHASE THREE

- Increased number of persons allowed for public worship, according to guidelines set by health officials
- Continued physical distancing and masking requirements likely
- Restrictive practices may still guide the celebration of Eucharist, with gradual easing
- Restrictions eased on office/classroom gathering, within guidelines
- Larger group ministries (youth groups, camps, classes) may resume within established guidelines
- Continued assessments of pandemic impact and prayerful discernment of future ministry

PHASE THREE Public Health Indicators:

PANDEMIC ILLNESS CASES, HOSPITALIZATIONS AND DEATHS HAVE FALLEN TO NEAR ZERO
WIDESPREAD TESTING AND TRACKING
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WELL EQUIPPED AND ABLE TO TREAT ALL IN NEED

PHASE FOUR

*Unlimited Gatherings
with Some Protections
(All or Most Physical Restrictions Lifted)*

CONGREGATION PROTOCOLS WITH GUIDELINES UNDER PHASE FOUR

- No limit to the number of worshipers who may attend, except that those who are known to be infectious, actively sick or who display any of the symptoms of being ill should not attend
- Worshipers may wear masks throughout the service, but masks will not be required
- Sacramental worship and community gathering restrictions are lifted

PHASE FOUR Public Health Indicators:

A VACCINE HAS BEEN DEVELOPED AND IS AVAILABLE TO ALL IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC
TREATMENT OF PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS IS WIDELY AVAILABLE
TESTING IS WIDESPREAD FOR VIRUS AND IMMUNITY

LIFE AFTER THE PANDEMIC: Continued Adaptation to New Reality

The process of reflection and adaptation has already begun. We place our hope in Christ, whose resurrection assures us that on the other side of death, there is life.

POST-PANDEMIC CONGREGATION INCREASED MISSION CAPACITY

- Both in-person and virtual meetings
- Increased engagement in small group gatherings and widespread pastoral care
- Increased online giving as well as in-person offerings
- Fruitful collaborative endeavors
- Right-sizing of building use and capacities to meet a growing mission field
- Streamlined, efficient use of financial and other resources
- Strategic efforts toward the realization of key strategic mission, vision and goals
- Emergency preparedness plans and strategies in place
- *Each congregation will develop specific strategies and checklists for its unique situations.*

Considerations for after restrictions are lifted:

1. In times when people may be carrying illness, who is welcome and who is not? How does that fit with your theology?
2. Have you contacted your insurance company about liability?
3. How will you maintain safe physical distancing?
4. What will personal greetings/the peace look like?
5. How will you respond if someone is demonstrably ill?
6. What might be the place for an influx of guests from other churches that remain closed?
7. How might you secure masks, hand sanitizer, or temperature checks? How does that fit with your theology of hospitality if you cannot?
8. How might you limit the spread of germs through congregational singing and projected voices?
9. How can you safely lead communion or baptism? If encouraging bringing your own elements, how might you safely maintain a theology of an open table if people arrive without bring their own elements?
10. How will you enforce any of the above?