

Guidelines for Re-Gathering the Church Body in Public Worship during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Developed by the ERC Church Health Commission 5-12-2020

As people of faith and members of the family of God, we have a need and desire to gather for the purpose of worshipping the God who sustains us in all of our troubles. In view of the current precautions concerning COVID-19, we want to love our neighbors as ourselves. And we desire to follow the instructions of Jesus to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Therefore, we make the following **recommendations** as we return to congregational gatherings:

1. Follow government guidelines for public gatherings. We understand that each state will roll out various expectations with different requirements. Therefore, we are not able to make blanket statements about what should be done. Plus, each congregation has different levels of ministry. We believe each of the following statements should be considered and dealt with in your own setting.
2. For at least the current and near future, handshaking and hugging should be replaced with other means of greetings.
3. Masks should be worn and given to people who have forgotten theirs.
4. Entrance doors should be propped open. If this is not possible, a masked person should be present at each unlocked door for the purpose of welcoming and opening the door for each worshipper.
5. Seating should be done with appropriate social distancing. This may mean that pews are skipped or people in the front row will sit on the ends. The people in the second row will sit in the middle and repeated throughout the sanctuary. If multiple services will be held in the same room, then appropriate CDC approved cleanings should be performed in all used spaces once each meeting is ended. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fdisinfecting-building-facility.html
6. Individual offerings should be brought to the front as part of the worship service or plates should be positioned at the door for people to contribute on the way in or out. Online giving can be offered as well via direct deposit or texting apps. Remind counters to wash hands when the counting is complete.
7. Hand sanitizing stations should be provided throughout the bethel. In the bathroom, Z-fold hand towels are much simpler to grasp out of dispensers than C-fold towels.
8. Children's ministry follows guidelines for cleaning nursery toys, tables, crafts, etc. according to state health guidelines prior to the first service back and after each service (see the CDC guidelines above). It may be wise to post signs stating what has been done to ease the minds of concerned parents. Cloth toys should be removed from the nursery.
9. Children's Sunday school should not happen at the current time. Consider some form of family worship guidelines.
10. Consider whether this is the time to start another worship service(s) so the congregation size can be smaller thus safer. It will serve as a way to reach new people.

11. Continue to offer video services. Think about how they can be improved. They do not have to be done the best, but we can do better. People will be looking for authenticity and will view local pastors as their preferred means of receiving spiritual guidance over an unknown national speaker.
12. Provide ways for the congregation to gather as small groups to foster disciple making.
13. At the current time pot luck meals should be discontinued. If a fellowship meal is conducted, then individuals can bring their own food.
14. Bibles and hymnals should be removed from sanctuary. Encourage people to bring their own Bible. Words for songs can be displayed on screens.
15. Bulletins should not be printed or distributed.
16. Develop a means to track attendance so that contact tracing can be provided in case of a known case of COVID-19 occurs within a parishioner.
17. Consider posting signs reminding people of social distancing guidelines (i.e. 6 feet, wash hands, no handshaking or hugging) and how the meeting place has been cleaned and will be cleaned after services. Also post a reminder that these practices are temporary.

As you plan on regathering for worship, please consider how your actions will affect those who attend and your witness to the community. Just because we are allowed to worship publicly, it may not be wise to gather at the current time. Be sure to inform the congregation about the process you used to make the decisions you have made. Blessings and peace to you as you continue to serve the community as God's people.

These are temporary guidelines for use as we come out of the stay-at-home orders and begin regathering as the People of God for public worship.

If you would like to talk through the application of these guidelines, feel free to contact Dave Williams (717) 805-6027 or any member of the Church Health Commission.