

Trinity Presbytery
Recommendation and Guidance for Returning to Buildings
or In-person Gatherings
Re: COVID-19 (May 21, 2020)

Updates are in Red.

RECOMMENDATION

Since all of the gating requirements or data guidelines mentioned on page two have not been met by the State of South Carolina, coupled with the fact that a majority of the leaders and members of our 61 congregations are in the vulnerable population, it is the recommendation of the Presbytery Coordinating Team that the congregations of Trinity Presbytery continue online worship, meetings, studies and fellowship until the State of South Carolina meets those standards; and, that during this time pastors and sessions use the *Guidance for Returning to Buildings or In-person Gatherings* and *Planning Worksheet* (See Appendix) provided by the Presbytery Coordinating Team to develop written plans to be implemented by their congregations for when they do return to their buildings or in-person gatherings; and, that each session submit to the Presbytery office a copy of their plans to be placed on file.

RATIONALE

At the outset, the Presbytery Coordinating Team wants to acknowledge that it is a challenging task to issue ***Guidance for Returning to Buildings or In-person Gatherings*** for church leaders in Trinity Presbytery, given the vast diversity found among the congregations that comprise Trinity Presbytery. It is made even more challenging knowing some of you are ready to reopen immediately while others want to wait until late summer. This challenge, however, pales in comparison to the one that you as pastors and session members must face as you make decisions about reopening your churches - decisions that will impact the well-being and health of others. The Presbytery Coordinating Team has gathered helpful, factual information and provided it here for your guidance. It is ultimately up to each pastor and session to educate themselves and decide as a body when and how to safely proceed with reopening their facility for in-person worship and church-related functions.

Church leaders must not make the decisions about how and when to reopen based on the faulty assumption that the worst of COVID-19 is over and everything can now return to normal. The coronavirus can – and will – surge again if we are not vigilant in following guidance from experts concerning how and when to reopen. It is still a dangerous time.

Church leaders need to utilize the deep resources of the Christian faith as you decide how and when your church will reopen. This ‘extra step’ is essential for Christians and quite probably will result in different decisions than those you might make without this step. Jesus’ command to love God and your neighbor as yourself and Jesus’ admonition that whatever we do to “the least of these we do to him” challenge you to consider the impact of your decisions on others, especially children, those who have underlying medical conditions, and those over age 60.

On Monday, May 11, 2020, SC Governor Henry McMaster stated that churches are now free to hold services, but there are guidelines for them to follow. Dr. Linda Bell, the state epidemiologist, said,

“DHEC staff has had a number of conference calls with church leaders across the state’s interdenominational faith community. We’ve also pointed them to information provided by the CDC.”

Your church must understand that Governor McMaster’s May 11, 2020, guidance for reopening places of worship does not give churches a green light to open immediately with no restrictions. It is highly restrictive and focuses on concrete benchmarks that must be in place as churches begin the reopening process (See [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community – and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)). The Governor’s guidance should be treated as a directive as you plan for the safe, phased reopening of your church.

Churches must be fully aware of the potentially tragic consequences to people in your families, congregation, and community if your church opens without fully implementing the Governor’s May 11, 2020, guidance. The premature reopening of churches without implementing the recommended guidelines provided will have a direct impact on the health and well-being of people you know and love. Wishful thinking and best intentions are not enough to keep people alive.

Guidance for Returning to Buildings or In-person Gatherings

The following is only a guide for congregations considering when and how to safely return to their buildings or in-person gatherings for church-related functions. This guide seeks to comply with the [South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control](#), the [National Guidelines Opening Up America Again](#), and best-practices recommendations by health officials. Because the virus COVID-19 will not be stopped or limited in its transmission by an arbitrary date, this guide (in accord with the others mentioned) necessitates phase-to-phase stages of return guided by gating requirements and the ability to gather data.

The [gating requirements](#) include **at each stage**:

- SYMPTOMS: Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses reported within a 14-day period AND downward trajectory of COVID-19-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period
- CASES: Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period
- HOSPITALS: Treat all patients without crisis care AND robust testing programs in place for at-risk healthcare workers, with decreasing numbers of infected healthcare workers

In addition, the State must affirm its abilities to gather the data through testing, contact tracing, and tracking, including:

- Every South Carolina resident who has symptoms of COVID-19 can get a lab test with results reported to the patient and state or local public health within 48 hours of collection.
- Contract tracing is engaged to ensure those who have been exposed, symptomatic or not, are properly quarantined.
- A tracking system is in place to monitor the spread of the disease AND is publicly available.

The only point at which returning to “church as usual” should be considered is when a vaccine is readily available. Through each phase, “If we don’t continue our efforts to contain the virus, a new

wave of infections and deaths will cause further damage, and we will lose what we've gained from the measures we've already taken. And if we push the envelope too far by reopening our buildings and resuming gatherings prematurely, we may unfairly force on our more vulnerable members the choice between keeping themselves and others safe and participating in congregational life like everyone else" (Wisconsin Council of Churches).

The progression from phase to phase may not be linear. It is likely that as we return to gathering in increasing numbers there will be spikes in outbreaks necessitating returns to previous phase recommendations until cases again subside and adhere to the data guidelines. Thus, at every stage, it will be important for the session to assess the data, listen to health experts, and act accordingly.

In the absence of a vaccine that is readily available, coupled with the fact that a return to church is going to be based upon a "new normal," this guide offers phase-by-phase recommendations and questions to consider, recognizing that this is not an instance for "one plan fits all". The membership and attendance of our presbytery's congregations vary as do the size of their sessions, deacons, Bible study, mission activities, etc. The same is true for the size of facilities and their capacity to provide space and adequate ventilation for appropriate social distancing at each phase. In all cases, those who are over age 60 and those with underlying health concerns that are considered more vulnerable must be taken under consideration. And while children and youth are at lower risk (not risk free), there is an ongoing risk of them carrying the virus back home and sharing it with other family members. There is also the developmental consideration that some ages/individuals lack the ability to understand the need for social distancing and are unable to maintain it.

In addition to our desire to protect the vulnerable and love our neighbors, there are practical reasons for reopening only when it is safe to do so. First, check with your insurance company as to any coverage restrictions or additional guidelines. It is possible your insurance company will impose requirements in order to continue coverage of the premises, liability coverage and workers' compensation coverage. Check specifically whether the congregation and session are individually covered by your policies, if one of your members or building users contracts COVID-19.

Second, by reopening, it could be argued that the congregation has accepted responsibility for ensuring the safety of the facility and compliance with public health guidelines. By law, you will owe a duty of care to people you invite to your church building or church functions and to your employees. The session will need to consider carefully the potential liability associated with reopening and should consult an attorney licensed in South Carolina. Especially for congregations that have not incorporated under state law, ask the attorney to advise about the personal liability of members.

These guidelines assume two consistent actions across all three phases. First, it assumes that pastors and sessions will consistently communicate the following precautions for avoiding COVID-19:

- Avoid large events and mass gatherings.
- Stay home if you have symptoms of COVID-19, or you have travelled recently to an area with community spread of COVID-19.
- Wear a cloth face mask in public areas
- Avoid close contact (within about 6 feet) with anyone who is sick or has symptoms.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

- Cover your mouth and nose with your elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw away the used tissue.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces you frequently touch on a daily basis.
- Encourage vulnerable individuals to continue sheltering in place.
- Follow the directions of your local health authority

Secondly, it assumes that if a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19 is in your building that pastors and sessions will:

- Contact the local health officials and assess the risk.
- Be prepared for a potential short-term facility closure or non-essential facility access restriction to clean and disinfect the building.
- Initiate contact tracing in consultation with local health officials.

PHASE ONE: THE RED ZONE

For all recommendations under Phase One: The Red Zone, gatherings of fewer than 10 are permissible provided face masks are worn and social distancing of at least 6 feet is maintained. High risk individuals should continue to shelter in place. Of course, if individuals are feeling sick, they should stay home.

What we recommend:

1. Continue online worship, meetings, studies and fellowship.
2. Consider allowances for using the building:
 - a. Recording services in the sanctuary.
 - b. Baptisms with immediate family only. **Should a pastor agree to preside, and a session authorizes a baptism, then consideration must be given as to how to administer the water during baptism while ensuring social distancing.**
 - c. Weddings and funerals with immediate family only.
 - d. Office and other administrative functions limited to as necessary while working remotely from home offices.
 - e. Users/renters/mission activities in accordance with gathering limits and protocols.
3. Provide visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
4. Promote online giving for offerings.
5. Consider offering “drive-in worship,” although guidelines must be followed to do so safely.
 - a. Coordinate with your local law enforcement or emergency management agency.
 - b. Use volunteers or signage to direct parking.
 - c. Everyone, including volunteers, staff, and clergy, must follow social distancing guidelines at all times.
 - d. No one should leave vehicles for any reason.
 - e. No bathroom facilities.

- f. No playground.
 - g. Park every other spot.
 - h. No one exchanges anything.
6. Each session needs to adopt their own “Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities” to address areas such as worship, fellowship, congregational care, Christian education, children’s programming, youth activities, and mission engagement. **Document in writing the safety protocols that you will follow and make them known to your congregations, employees, and building users.**
 7. A plan for thorough cleaning between uses and sanitizing of high use areas. [CDC - Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

Questions to consider under Phase One: The Red Zone

1. Will additional signage be needed throughout the church explaining changes?
2. What will you do if your pastor or other employees are in the high-risk category? What can you expect from employees by state law, and what rights or limits exist on your ability to take action against employees who are unwilling or unable to work under the conditions you set?
3. How will the session encourage the membership to follow the safety protocols that are adopted and, if necessary, to enforce them?
4. How will you show care and justice for the individuals asked to provide cleaning and sanitizing?
5. How will you handle a situation during “drive-in worship” if you have a person who chooses not to comply with the stated guidelines?
6. What action will you take if users/renters are not equipped or are not willing to follow your safety protocols?

PHASE TWO: THE YELLOW ZONE

For all recommendations under Phase Two: The Yellow Zone, in-person gatherings are permissible provided face masks are worn and substantial social distancing of at least 6 feet is maintained. High risk individuals should continue to shelter in place. Should high risk individuals participate in smaller groups the group size is to be limited to no more than 10 people. Of course, if individuals are feeling sick, they should stay home.

What we recommend:

1. Churches are not required to resume any in-person activities. Sessions have the authority to proceed as slowly as they believe prudent.
2. Worship in the building may resume (see above) coupled with virtual services to meet the needs of all worshipers.
3. Accommodate social distancing by using multiple worship services, if necessary.
4. Signs displayed to advise no entry if recent fever, symptoms or contact with COVID-19 positive patient.
5. Provide visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.

6. Have hand sanitizing stations at entrances
7. Any decision-making bodies (sessions, boards, committees, etc.) that meet in-person must also offer the option to join meetings remotely, via telephone or video conferencing.
8. Continue to offer communion online (or defer), preferably through a medium such as zoom or face time, to allow for participants to be at table “together.”
Rationale: The act of communion requires a level of proximity and touch that continues to be unsafe under Phase Two. Consider that in order to partake of communion, masks must be shifted – touching a face mask contaminates it. Any item (bread/cup/plate/etc.) used to prepare and serve communion requires at least two people touching it (usually more). Alternatives to the ways we traditionally practice Communion may be available, but may also raise both practical and theological issues, which each session will need to weigh as they consider this matter.
9. No singing or use of wind instruments. ([WCC-Church Music in the Time of Covid-19](#))
Rationale: Public Health Officials recommend no singing in public or use of wind instruments until we have a vaccine. The aerosols produced in singing stay in the air for hours, move with air currents, and remain infectious for hours. Cloth masks are not effective in protecting against the fine kind of aerosol produced by singing - either in or out.
10. Use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace and collecting the offering as well as providing access to electronic bulletins via email or projecting the liturgy, which is ideal though not always possible. It is important for worshipers to understand that this virus can live on an offering plate, communion tray, or worship bulletin just as easily as a gas pump handle.
11. Consider removing Bibles, hymnals, friendship pads, pew cushions, if possible, and other items from the pews/chairs.
12. Intensify promotion of online giving.
13. Consider the air flow in your building and leave doors and windows open (as able) to provide maximal air flow. Avoid using HVAC systems that recirculate air.
14. Require groups including individuals of the vulnerable population to be no larger than 10 people.
15. Discourage gathering/remaining after the service for fellowship.
16. Monitor lines for entry/exit to ensure social distancing.
17. Infants/Children/Youth should remain in worship with parents/guardians.
18. Baptisms may be provided using the same guidelines as Phase One.
19. Weddings and funerals permitted within the guidelines for Phase Two gatherings.
20. Office and other administrative functions may return provided safety measures are addressed.
21. Use of building to users/renters/mission activities/Bible studies/meetings in accordance with gathering limits and protocols.
22. A more thorough plan for providing for cleaning between uses and sanitizing of high use areas. [CDC - Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).
Rationale: The more people accessing the building and coming into contact with items increases, the greater the necessity to maintain cleaning procedures and ensure sanitizing high use spaces and multi-use items.

Questions to consider under **Phase Two: The Yellow Zone**

1. If you decide to return to in-person worship, how will you continue to provide worship to those who either choose, or are encouraged due to risk, to remain at home?
2. Consider doing a mental walkthrough of every space in the church, from the front doors, to the bathroom, to the sanctuary and classrooms, and to the kitchen. Think through what is touched and how long people will spend in that area. Who will be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting these areas?

3. How will you provide for adequate social distancing in your spaces (e.g., in the sanctuary, one family per pew, pews roped off/separated?) What areas are better to close off?
4. What will you do if more people show up for worship making it impossible for you to ensure substantial social distancing of at least 6 feet is maintained? For those with larger memberships, how will you provide in-person worship that meets your membership? What considerations need to be given for the staff and volunteer work needed to provide and maintain this?
5. If smaller in-person groups are meeting at your church that include individuals in the high-risk population, how will you ensure that the group size is no more than 10 people?
6. How will you handle a situation in which a person wishes to use the building or attend worship, but is not equipped or willing to comply with the safety protocols?
7. What role (if any) will greeters/ushers play? What guidance will they need to fulfill their role?
8. For Communion, while tongs, rubber gloves, plastic cups, and individually sealed wafers may be available, do they really convey the feeling that this is “the feast of our Lord”? Similarly, if individuals are to bring their own elements, what message is then conveyed to visitors or those who did not bring their own- the table becomes a place where some can participate and others cannot, which contradicts the message of “all are welcome”.
9. In determining which activities to resume, how will the wearing of face masks and social distancing impact the experience? (Picture your session/Bible study group/other groups gathering, all wearing masks and spaced appropriately- what is their ability to hear and engage one another? What special set-up and other precautions are needed before and after and who will see to them?)
10. What additional guidelines or protocols do you need to develop for those accessing your building (i.e.: additional signage)? How will you manage the flow of traffic in and out of your building to provide for social distancing?
11. What steps are necessary to provide safe conditions for any employees/volunteers? Will there be access to gloves/masks/hand sanitizer/regular cleaning?
12. What percentage of your congregation/usual volunteers/staff are in the high-risk category? What might you need to rethink/plan differently in light of this?
13. What is your communication plan and response plan if one of your members/staff/renters contracts COVID-19? How will you keep track of attendees to every function, so that contact tracing can be done in the event of a member’s infection?

PHASE THREE: THE GREEN ZONE

For all recommendations under Phase Three, face masks are strongly encouraged, and while social distancing is not necessary, it is encouraged to limit crowding. High risk individuals should continue to shelter in place.

What we recommend:

1. Worship and gatherings of all sizes may resume but consider offering multiple worship services which would allow worshipers to spread out, as well as continuing virtual services to meet the needs of all worshipers. Consider online options as well for Bible studies, meetings, etc.

2. Watch for public health recommendations before resuming Communion and singing/wind instruments.
3. Continue to use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources.
4. Provide visual displays of advice on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
5. Continue online giving.
6. Fellowship gatherings, including potlucks, are still discouraged.
7. We recommend not offering Vacation Bible School in person, though regular Sunday School, Confirmation, and other classes may resume.
8. Office functions could resume as normal, with attention to cleaning.
9. Consider limiting crowding near entryways and exits.
10. Consider the air flow in your building and leave doors and windows open (as able) to provide maximal air flow.

Questions to consider under Phase Three: The Green Zone

1. What steps are necessary to provide safe conditions for any employees/volunteers? Will there be access to gloves/masks/hand sanitizer/regular cleaning?
2. What percentage of your congregation/usual volunteers/staff are in the high-risk category? What might you need to rethink/plan differently in light of this?
3. What is your communication plan and response plan if one of your members/staff/renters contracts COVID-19?
4. What additional steps should you take to provide for optimal safety and health of all participants as in person engagement increases and people’s caution decreases? This should include adjusted Phase Three cleaning procedures in line with occupancy and use of objects (i.e.: children’s toys, youth areas, etc.)

~~~~~

*“The ongoing threat of the Covid-19 global pandemic will require that we return to church in a way that is measured and mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable among us. While some may begin to attend public worship in person, we know that some will need to continue to worship at home for some time. We give thanks, then, for the promise of our faith—that the Lord God will bless and keep us, the risen Christ is with us, and the Holy Spirit connects us with believers near and far. We take comfort and inspiration from the example of the earliest believers, who “spent much time together in the temple” and “broke bread at home . . . with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). As we anxiously track the news in these times—with numbers of new cases, numbers of persons who have died, and numbers of those who are recovering—we remember the good news of the gospel: “And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).”*

(Returning to Public Worship- Theological and Practical Considerations, PC(USA))

~~~~~

Planning Worksheet for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities in Phase Two: The Yellow Zone

The State of South Carolina's Phase Two: The Yellow Zone is a phase of aggressive disease-mitigation in which the stay-at-home order is lifted, vulnerable individuals are to continue sheltering in place, in-person gatherings are permitted as long as substantial social-distancing of six-feet is maintained; and mask-wearing, increased hygiene, and intensified sanitation measures are necessary. In-person meetings that have participants in the high-risk population are limited to no more than 10 people. In order to help keep congregants and neighbors safe, each pastor and session is responsible for creating a Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities. This is a daunting and sobering task which none of our pastors and sessions have ever undertaken before, but it is an important part of our call to be the church with integrity and love in this moment in world history.

To reiterate our best guidance: During Phase Two: The Yellow Zone, the medical experts tell us that ANY gatherings may bring increased risk to others and ourselves. Needed accommodations will be cumbersome, costly, and open to human error. Across the country, many churches are choosing to continue their present arrangements for the time being.

In accordance with guidance from the [South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control](#), (SCDHEC) the [Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention](#) (CDC), [The World Health Organization International](#) (WHO), and the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s [Returning to Public Worship Theological and Practical Considerations](#) (Returning to Public Worship), we offer this planning worksheet for resuming in-person worship and activities in Phase Two: The Yellow Zone. Use this detailed list of questions to guide your deliberation and planning as you undertake this endeavor of resuming in-person worship and activities. We hope and pray that, guided by the Holy Spirit, grappling with these questions together will help you discern what faithfully and lovingly resuming in-person gathering might look like in your unique ministry context. Answers to the following questions should be included in your church's plan. (Not every question will apply to every congregation, but we urge you to consider carefully and diligently all that are relevant to your specific ministry context. Additionally, there may be questions that you realize need to be addressed as it pertains to your unique ministry context that are not found anywhere in *Trinity Presbytery's Guidance for Returning to Buildings or In-person Gatherings*. If so, then be sure to ask and answer those questions as well.)

Growing into the Future

1. What new or renewed forms of ministry, new technological capacity, and new ways of making the life of the congregation more accessible did you develop during this pandemic that you can carry into your future ministry?

2. What new mission has God given you during this time?
3. Which practices do you most sorely feel the lack of and want to prioritize resuming when it becomes feasible to do so safely?
4. Which things that were meaningful and seemed necessary a few months ago have you discovered you might be able to let go of?
5. Are there ways that a change in pace and activities has benefited leaders and members of your church? What rhythms will be life-giving as you begin to resume more activities?

Worship Location

1. When your county enters Phase Two: The Yellow Zone, do you plan to . . .
 - Continue to conduct all worship remotely
 - Record or livestream worship services from the church building, with a group of worship leaders and tech crew physically gathered
 - How will you ensure that appropriate physical distance is maintained between people— twenty feet for singers and six feet for all others?
 - How will you ensure that people wear masks and that everyone washes/sanitizes their hands upon arrival?
 - What other safety precautions need to be taken?
 - Invite some or all of the congregation to attend worship in person
 - How will you ensure that the number of people gathered does not exceed the substantial social distancing of at least 6 feet requirements? What will you do if more people arrive for a worship service making it impossible for you to ensure that substantial social distancing of at least 6 feet is maintained?
 - How will you ensure that vulnerable individuals (the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions) shelter in place while others are invited to attend in-person worship? What will you do if a vulnerable individual arrives for in-person worship?
 - How will you ensure that worshipers stay at least six feet apart at all times?
 - How will you ensure that all worshippers over the age of two years wear masks and that everyone washes/sanitizes their hands upon arrival? What will you do if someone arrives without a mask?
 - Medical and vocal experts caution that some research indicates that singing and projected speaking (such as preaching) may spread minute aerosols that travel up to 20 feet and will stay in the air for hours. Research is ongoing, including whether a plexiglass shield would contain droplets and aerosols. Will those leading worship wear masks? If not, how will you keep the congregation at least twenty feet away from any people without masks?

- How will those who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person services be able to participate in the congregation’s worship?
 - What provisions will you make to monitor the flow of people as they arrive and leave (e.g. what doors do people use, do people stagger their arrival time, will people be dismissed one row at a time)?
 - Will you make provisions to take temperatures, check for other symptoms, or administer tests (when available) as people arrive?
 - What other safety precautions need to be taken?
- Hold “drive-in” worship services
- How will you ensure that all worshipers remain in their vehicles, with all windows closed, for the duration of their time on church property? If windows are permitted to be opened, how will you ensure that all vehicles remain at least six feet apart and all people are wearing masks?
 - How will you ensure that vehicles only contain the members of a single household?
 - If a person does not comply with the guidelines for drive-in worship, how will you deal with this situation?
 - How will those who do not drive be able to participate in the congregation’s worship?
- Hold worship services outdoors when weather permits
- How will you answer all of the questions listed above in the section titled “Invite some or all of the congregation to attend in person”?
 - What will you do if the weather is inclement?
 - How will you measure outdoor airflow to determine whether wind is likely to spread airborne droplets?
 - Enforcing the substantial social distancing of at least 6 feet on worship gatherings could be much more difficult outdoors. How will you approach this challenge?
 - Will gathering outdoors make it more challenging to livestream or record worship for those who are not able to attend in person? How will you address those challenges?

Worship Service Elements

(See “[Returning to Public Worship: Theological and Practical Considerations](#)” pages 13-19)

1. Since medical and vocal experts tell us that group singing is among the riskiest congregational activities for spreading COVID-19, how will you safely incorporate music into your worship services?
2. How will you instruct congregants to pass the Peace of Christ without physical contact?
3. What alternatives to touching shared surfaces (hymnals/Bibles, attendance pads, bulletins, offering plates, door handles, etc.) will you implement?
4. What is your plan regarding celebration of the sacraments? The best medical advice is either to refrain celebrating Communion in-person or to use pre-sealed elements.

5. What other changes to your typical worship service might be necessary?
6. If your custom is to have a fellowship time before or after worship, how will you need to alter or suspend this practice?

Mission & Outreach

1. Are there forms of local mission or outreach that you suspended, but that you might be called to reinstate now? If so, how can you do so safely for all involved?
2. What new opportunities for serving and caring for your neighbors have you developed in the past months and you believe that God is calling you to continue? What new opportunities are you called to engage as we move into an uncharted future?
3. How is God compelling you to use your building for mission-critical ministries (such as recovery groups or hunger or homeless ministries) even when this use requires you to make provisions for scheduling, cleaning and disinfection?
4. If you operate a preschool, do you believe you can realistically follow the CDC's guidance for child care programs (found on pages 1-3 of the [CDC re-opening guidelines](#))? A church or preschool board that operates a preschool should consult with their insurance provider for liability considerations and other area preschools for regional planning. When the decision is made to reopen, the preschool director and the session or preschool board should work together to create a detailed plan for resuming operation of the preschool. If your church hosts an externally-owned and operated preschool that receives government funding, then that preschool must consult with the corresponding agencies for re-opening protocols.

Meetings

1. When your county enters Phase Two: The Yellow Zone, do you plan to . . .
 - Continue to hold all meetings remotely
 - Permit the session, trustees, board of deacons, committees, and/or staff to meet in person
 - How will members who cannot yet safely or comfortably gather with others attend meetings remotely and fully participate in discussions and votes? Any decision-making body that meets in-person must also offer the option to join meetings remotely, via telephone or video conferencing.
 - What new technology, equipment, or expertise will you need to enable participants to call or video-conference in to primarily in-person meetings?
 - How will you ensure that the gathered group contains fewer than ten people if it has individuals in the high risk population, that all in-person participants wear masks and wash/sanitize hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized?
 - What meeting space will best meet your technological and social-distancing needs?
 - Permit Bible studies, small groups, and/or adult Sunday School classes to meet in person
 - How will you ensure that the gathered group maintains size limitations in keeping with

substantial social distancing requirements, that all in-person participants wear masks and wash/sanitize hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is reduced?

- How will people who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person gatherings access faith formation and fellowship opportunities remotely?
 - Can the option to join Bible studies/small groups/classes remotely be offered? What new technology, equipment, or expertise would you need to enable participants to call or video-conference in to primarily in-person meetings?
 - What meeting space will best meet your technological and social-distancing needs? Can some types of gatherings be held outdoors?
2. If the session opts to allow the possibility of in-person meetings, how will decisions be made about which meetings happen in person and which happen remotely?

Children's & Youth Ministry

(See the section on Mission and Outreach for preschool considerations. This section covers other children's and youth ministries.)

1. When your county enters Phase Two: The Yellow Zone, do you plan to . . .
 - Continue to offer all children's and youth ministry remotely
 - Offer in-person activities for middle/high school students
 - What types of youth programs can you safely hold, and which will need to be modified, cancelled, or postponed? Could gatherings be held outdoors
 - How will you ensure that the group maintain size limitations in keeping with social distancing requirements, that all participants wear masks and wash/sanitize hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized?
 - How will teens/families who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend/send a child to in-person gatherings access faith formation and fellowship opportunities remotely?
 - Offer in-person activities for older elementary-aged children
 - What types of children's programs can you safely hold, and which will need to be modified, postponed, or cancelled? Could gatherings be held outdoors?
 - How will you ensure that the group maintains size limitation in keeping with the six-foot social distancing requirements between people, that everyone—including children—wears a mask and washes/sanitizes hands upon arrival, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized?
 - How will children/families who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend/send a child to in-person gatherings access faith formation and fellowship opportunities remotely?
 - Offer in-person activities and/or nursery care for preschool-aged and younger elementary-aged children.

- Since infants and small children cannot practice social distancing, cannot safely wear masks, and cannot reasonably be prevented from touching objects and putting things in their mouths, we recommend delay in implementing nursery, pre-school, and younger elementary-aged activities. Added to this is the fact that many volunteers are in at-risk categories due to age. The first question to answer is “Do you think that this can be done safely?”
 - How will you minimize the extent to which toys, materials, and other items are shared between children?
 - How will you implement a frequent and intensive disinfecting regimen?
2. How will you equip parents to engage in faith formation and religious instruction at home?
 3. How can your teachers, youth leaders, and children’s ministry volunteers (especially those who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person gatherings) continue to build relationships with and nurture their students remotely?

Building Management

1. What is your plan for cleaning and disinfecting?
 - Worship spaces?
 - Meeting rooms?
 - Classrooms, nurseries, and children’s areas?
 - Offices and staff workspaces?
 - Doors, entryways/ vestibules, and other high-traffic or enclosed areas? (Refer to the [CDC website](#) for guidance.)
2. How will you manage the cleaning and disinfecting of restrooms after each individual use? (Best practices include a trained and designated cleaner who sanitizes the restroom after each use, one individual using the facility at a time, and social distancing for those in line.)
3. Do you have an adequate supply of approved cleaning supplies, soap, and hand sanitizers available? What is your plan for keeping these supplies in stock? What will you do if you run out? If hand sanitizer can’t be obtained, how will you manage hand-washing for all people entering the building? (Refer to the [EPA website](#) for guidance on effective cleaning agents.)
4. Which rooms/spaces will best facilitate social distancing, ease of cleaning, and remote participation in gatherings via technology? Which rooms/spaces should not be used for the time being?
5. How can you rearrange seating areas to promote social distancing in worship spaces, meeting rooms, and other parts of the building?
6. How will you manage the traffic flow to maintain social distancing in hallways, entrances/exits, and other tight spaces?
7. Which windows and doors can be propped open while people are in the building, to increase the flow of fresh air?
8. Will you use air-conditioning? Some research indicates that air-conditioning system may dramatically increase the range in which droplets and aerosols spread.

9. Will your church office be open to the public? If so, what new procedures will you need to implement?
10. How will you provide for deep-cleaning and disinfection if it is discovered that someone known to be infected has been in the building? (See [CDC guidelines](#) for specifics.)
11. If community groups use your church building, how will cleaning and disinfection be handled? Will they be asked to share in the costs of extra custodial work if the church performs the cleaning? How will you ensure compliance with your safety standards if they provide the cleaning?

Staff

1. Phase Two: The Yellow Zone urges that employees continue to work remotely where possible. Will your expectations about what portion of time staff spend working from the church building change when you enter Phase Two: The Yellow Zone? If so, what new safety procedures will need to be implemented? How will more work hours spent at the church impact your building's cleaning and sanitizing needs? (Refer to [CDC Guidelines for Public Places](#).)
2. If multiple people are working at the church building simultaneously, how will you ensure that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, that masks are worn when necessary, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized? Will individuals need to perform their own disinfection after restroom or kitchen use?
3. How will accommodations be made for pastors and other church staff who are vulnerable individuals, or who live with a vulnerable individual in their household?
4. How will you help pastors, staff, and others with leadership responsibilities in worship or other programming avoid the temptation to come to in-person activities if they feel unwell?

Pastoral Care

1. How will pastors, deacons, Stephen Ministers, and others safely and compassionately offer pastoral care to people in lower-risk groups?
2. How will pastors, deacons, Stephen Ministers, and others safely and compassionately offer pastoral care to people in higher-risk groups?
3. How will pastors, deacons, Stephen Ministers, and others safely and compassionately offer pastoral care to hospital patients, nursing home residents, and others in group facilities?

Communication

1. Understanding that this is a time of uncertainty and rapidly evolving plans, how will you communicate with your congregation in ways that are frequent, are redundant, use various communication methods, and set the needed theological and relational tone?
2. How will you communicate plans for in-person activities in ways that do not pressure people to take undue risks or make people who need to stay at home feel excluded? What theological principles can you draw upon?

3. How will you communicate the importance of social distancing, mask wearing, group size limits, and other safety practices to those who might be resistant? What theological principles can you draw upon?
4. How will you encourage congregation members, leaders, and staff to stay home if they are feeling unwell or displaying any COVID-19 related symptoms?
5. How will you help those joining in-person events remotely to feel and function like full and active participants and not passive observers?
6. How will congregational leaders make an extra effort to connect with those who are unable to attend in-person gatherings?

Special Events

1. How will you ensure that all protocols for safe worship services are implemented at funerals? What additional safe forms of ministry can you offer to the bereaved? (See “[Returning to Public Worship](#)” pages 15-16.)
2. How will you ensure that all protocols for safe worship services are implemented at weddings? In what additional ways can you safely celebrate those who are getting married? (See “[Returning to Public Worship](#)” pages 15-16.)
3. Are there any situations in which you would consider serving food or beverages? The best guidance is to refrain from serving any food or beverages during Phase Two: The Yellow Zone. If there is to be food at an event, then the best guidance is to offer prepackaged food and beverages. If other food service is to be offered, then the Interim Guidance for Restaurants and Bars in the “[CDC Guidelines for Re-Opening](#)” (beginning on page 12) offers comprehensive advice on safe facility management and food handling procedures.

Being Prepared

1. How will you compile and maintain accurate lists of those who attended church activities in case those records are needed for contact-tracing?
2. What will you do if someone who attended a church event tests positive for COVID-19 or suspects they might have COVID-19?
3. If there is a resurgence of COVID-19, your county could be placed back in Phase One: The Red Zone by the State of South Carolina, at which point the Presbytery’s mandate to suspend all in-person activities would go back into effect. How will you remain flexible and prepared for this possibility?
4. How will you make decisions about when and how your Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities might need to be adjusted over the course of our time in Phase Two: The Yellow Zone?

¹ Adapted from the Worksheet for Churches in the Yellow Phase by Donegal Presbytery.

Articles, Videos and Webinars Consulted that May Serve as Resources to Help Your Session Develop Specific Plans for Returning to Your Building or In-Person Gatherings

accelerateSC. "SC's Response to COVID-19," <https://accelerate.sc.gov/>.

ACHR The News. *HVAC systems should be checked before buildings reopen, due to COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.achrnews.com/articles/143102-hvac-systems-should-be-checked-before-buildings-reopen-due-to-covid-19>

Astute Solutions. *COVID-19 return to work readiness checklist*. Retrieved from <https://crm.astutesolutions.com/CL006-COVID-19-A-Return-to-Work-Readiness-Checklist.html>.

Braddy, Ken. April 18, 2020. *24 questions your church should answer before people return*. Retrieved from <https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

Braddy, Ken. *48 questions to ask prior to reopening your church*. Retrieved from <https://kenbraddy.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/48-questions-to-ask-prior-to-reopening-your-church-3.pdf>.

Bullard, Jr., George. *Relaunching your congregation – the what and how – not the when*. Retrieved from <https://www.columbiametro.org/relaunching-your-congregation/>.

Burge, Ryan P. April 23, 2020. Christianity Today. *Churches should not be the first to open*. Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/april-web-only/churches-reopen-older-adults-coronavirus-risk-states.html>

Butler, Joey. May 11, 2020. UM News. *Churches have much to consider before reopening*. Retrieved from <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/churches-have-much-to-consider-before-reopening>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Cleaning and disinfecting your facility*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility-H.pdf>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Employer Information for Office Buildings*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *FAQs for administrators and leaders at community- and faith-based organizations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-faith-based/faq.html>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *How to protect yourself and others*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim guidance for administrators and leaders of community- and faith-based organizations to plan, prepare, and respond to coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19)*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html> .
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Implementation of mitigation strategies for communities with local covid-19 transmission*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community-mitigation-strategy.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Reopening guidelines*. Retrieved from https://01fac7b6250d493d1127-d8590c8a28c33460e15368faedce8b94.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/c/0e10396034_1589306729_covid-cdc-reopening-guidelines-0520.pdf.
- Columbia Chamber of Commerce. April 26, 2020. Defend your business from COVID-19 with mpale. <https://partners.columbiachamber.com/hotdeals/info/rtc-hospitality-solutions-defend-your-business-fromcovid-19-with-mpale-04-26-2020>
- Environmental Protection Agency. *Pesticide registration/ list n: disinfectants for use against sars-cov-2*. Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- Foothills Presbytery. *Questions to consider before reopening*. Retrieved from <https://media.myworshiptimes22.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/05/07151514/FINAL2-Questions-to-Consider-Before-Re-Opening-blue-titles.pdf>
- Kirchoff, Rick. *Guidance for the new normal*. Retrieved from <https://clergycoachingnetwork.blog/>.
- Kohlmann, Cindy. *Adaption of Ken Braddy's 24 questions your church should answer before people return*. Retrieved from <https://files.constantcontact.com/51a0f576001/20131375-29d9-480f-beda-298abf08bfa0.docx>.
- Larkman, Connie. May 14, 2020. *Rhode Island church to refrain from in person worship for at least a year due to covid-19*. Retrieved from https://www.ucc.org/news_rhode_island_church_to_refrain_from_in_person_worship_for_at_least_a_year_due_to_covid_19_05132020.
- LifeWay. A Free Congregational Survey That Can Be Adapted to Your Congregation to Assess Your Members Expectations of When to Begin In-Person Worship, Comfort Level in Attending Large and Small Groups, and Precautions That Should Be Made for the Entire Church and Specific Ministry Areas, and More. *Lifeway research COVID-19 congregational survey*. Retrieved

from <http://factsandtrends.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LifeWay-Research-COVID19-Congregational-Survey.docx>.

Markland, Cheryl. *Preparing your children's ministry for post-covid-19*. Retrieved from <https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/preparing-your-childrens-ministry-for-post-covid-19.pdf>.

Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church. May 2020. *Principles and directions for the reopening of UMC facilities in Michigan*. Retrieved from <https://michiganumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/UMC-Principles-and-Directions.pdf>.

Morrill, Jake. *Churches in this VUCA time*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uAKQXagwms>.

NBCNews.com. *COVID-19 spread silently through rural Arkansas church, CDC says*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/covid-19-spread-silently-through-rural-arkansas-church-march-cdc-n1210391>

Nelson, Heather R. *Singing, the church, and covid-19: a caution for moving forward in our current pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.drheathernelson.com/singingandcovid19?fbclid=IwAR0ocPh9p47ZvjhJBNyH3-kmQg6Nlir7xqP4z5qcLCCFGmyUIwyc-sROhQ>.

Nieuwhof, Carey. *Avoid this big mistake: stepping back into the past when you step back into your building*. Retrieved from <https://careynieuwhof.com/avoid-this-big-mistake-stepping-back-into-the-past-when-you-step-back-into-your-building/>.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *Guidance on preparing workplaces for COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *Ten steps all workplaces can take to reduce risk of exposure to coronavirus*. Retrieved from <https://www.wichurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/OSHA-10-Steps-to-Reduce-Coronavirus-Exposure-Poster.pdf>.

Parish, Nurya Love. *Thinking about reopening church – in the age of coronavirus*. Retrieved from <https://www.churchwork.com/thinking-about-reopening-church-in-the-age-of-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR1iTxypEe0p8GT1swAfVQEp6QpFw87eWcjySNw7Tw6EtDctOfdZcCDntCg>.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Beginning conversations for re-entry*. https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/beginning-conversations-for-re-entry.pdf

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Coronavirus/ COVID-19 resource center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>

- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Returning to public worship - theological and practical considerations*. Retrieved from https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning_to_public_worship_may_2020.pdf.
- Prevent Epidemics.org. *Practical tips for personal anti-virus infection control*. Retrieved from https://preventepidemics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/RTSL_Covid_PracticalTips_v5.pdf
- Prevent Epidemics.org. *When and how to reopen after covid-19*. Retrieved from https://preventepidemics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COV020_WhenHowLoosenFaucet_v4.pdf
- Rainer, Thom, et.al. A Webinar. *14 preparations you must make before returning to your church facility*. Retrieved from <https://event.webinarjam.com/replay/31/rkno7av2h04ungfrxyy>
- Rains, Sharon. The Confident KidMin. April 24, 2020. *Ten steps for reopening children's ministry*. Retrieved from <https://theconfidentkidmin.com/ten-steps-for-reopening-childrens-ministry/>.
- Safra, Edmond J. Center for Ethics. *Pandemic resilience: getting it done – a supplement to the roadmap to pandemic resilience*. Retrieved from https://ethics.harvard.edu/files/center-for-ethics/files/roadmapsupplement_final.pdf.
- SmartChurch Solutions. *Post-coronavirus facility re-opening checklist*. Retrieved from <https://www.smartchurchsolutions.com/blog/church-facility-re-opening-checklist>
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)*. Retrieved from <https://www.scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>
- Stetzer, Ed. May 14, 2020. CT. *When states don't talk with churches about COVID timetables, tensions increase*. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/may/states-not-talking-to-churches-we-can-find-better-way.html>
- Synod of Mid America. *What to say when people say the coronavirus is all a part of God's plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6UwCpCrqaM&feature=youtu.be&app=desktop>.
- The Board of Pensions. *Protect yourself and those around you from coronavirus*. Retrieved from <http://www.pensions.org/news-and-events/articles/protect-yourself-and-those-around-you-from-coronavirus>.
- The Church Network.com. *Church resources for reopening*. Retrieved from <https://www.thechurchnetwork.com/Online/COVID-19.aspx>.
- The Insurance Board. *Reopening your church office*. Retrieved from <https://www.insuranceboard.org/reopening-your-church-office/>.

- The Presbyteries of Grand Canyon and de Cristo. *Presbytery recommendations on reopening churches*. Retrieved from <https://pbygrandcanyon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Reopening-FINAL-4.29.2020.pdf>.
- The Presbytery of Donegal. *Worksheet for churches in yellow phase*. Retrieved from https://01fac7b6250d493d1127-d8590c8a28c33460e15368faedce8b94.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/c/0e10396038_1589306732_covid-worksheet-for-churches-for-the-yellow-phase-0520.pdf
- Tidsworth, Mark. *Six practices for reshaping church*. Retrieved from <https://www.pinnlead.com/covid19-emerging-church-practice>.
- Tidsworth, Mark. *10 considerations for reopening church: returning to worship cannot mean returning to normal*. Retrieved from <https://www.pinnlead.com/blog/2020/5/5/10-considerations-for-reopening-church-returning-to-worship-cannot-mean-returning-to-normal>
- Vanderbloemen, William. *Reopening churches: leading children and family ministry after COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/cwn/2020/may/reopening-churches-leading-children-and-family-ministry-after-covid-19>.
- Whitehouse.gov. CDC and Whitehouse. *Guidelines for opening America*. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>.
- Whitehouse.gov. *Testing overview: opening up American again*. Retrieved from <https://www.akingump.com/a/web/qiBXPjSX6CoWKk2uN2Sbpw/white-house-testing-overview-opening-up-america-again.pdf>
- Wisconsin Badger. *Bounce back plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02653a.pdf>.
- Wisconsin Council of Churches. *Church music in the age of COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.wichurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Returning-to-Church-Church-Music-final.pdf>.
- Wisconsin Council of Churches. *Returning to church*. Retrieved from <https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>.
- World Health Organization International. *How to use the who mass gathering religious addendum risk assessment tool in the context of COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/how-to-use-the-who-mass-gathering-religious-addendum-risk-assessment-tool-in-the-context-of-covid-19>
- World Health Organization International. April 7, 2020. *Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>.

World Health Organization International. Site for Downloadable COVID-19 Signage for Posting Around Your Building. *Protect yourself and others*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>.