



## Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ

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### **Suggested Recommendation for Reopening Churches in the Missouri Mid-South Conference**

*As of April 23, 2020*

Easter Greetings, Missouri Mid-South Conference.

**As your Conference Minister, I write to strongly suggest that the Churches of the Missouri Mid-South Conference continue online worship and ministry until June 1, 2020.** I offer the following to explain my recommendation in greater detail.

#### Theological Grounding

I am reminded of the psalmist who prayed, “How long, O God?” in the midst of the exile of the Israelites. They yearned to go home but were forced into exile for 50 years. They wrestled with the shift of God’s presence (from temple to the tent amongst their exile). They wrestled with their unknown question of how long they would remain in exile. My friends, many of us in the past few days have prayerfully asked this same question about how long we need to remain in quarantine and be the Church while observing physical distance for the health of all.

#### Current Status

The governors of Arkansas, Memphis, and Missouri, are encouraging faith communities to worship in person starting May 1. Interestingly, they have also cancelled school for the remainder of the school year. One could ask why faith communities are allowed to gather in-person when schools are not. Our question as Church leaders must be, **“When is the best time for our members, neighbors, and community to return to in-person Church events?”**

#### Recommended Guideline for Consideration of Reopening to In-Person Church Events:

I offer the following for your Church leaders to consider as you make your own decision:

- **Study the Statistics for Forecasting the Future of COVID-19 for the next 4 weeks**
  - The following statistics below as well as the data you research should provide helpful information for your state, county, and community about COVID and the forecast of a resurgence if we reopen too soon.
    - Forecasting Future COVID Cases (Nationally)
      - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/forecasting-us.html>
    - Forecasting Future COVID cases (By State)
      - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/pdf/2020-04-13-state-plots-no-ens.pdf>
    - Arkansas Statistics on COVID Cases (as of 4-21-20)
      - <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/covid-19-county-data>
    - Missouri Statistics on COVID Cases (as of 4-21-20)
      - <https://health.mo.gov/living/healthcondiseases/communicable/novel-coronavirus/results.php>
    - Tennessee Statistics on COVID Cases (as of 4-21-20)
      - <https://www.tn.gov/governor/covid-19.html>

- **Contact your County Department of Health for their recommendations for your county.**
  - They will provide information about your particular county and offer guidance about reopening.
  - In rural areas, many hospitals closed before the pandemic because of insufficient funding. Therefore, if there is an increase of COVID cases in your rural county, will your current hospital facilities be able to accommodate the increased need?
- **Assess the Health of Your Members and Neighbors**
  - Are those who will enter your church building within the population that has been most susceptible to this pandemic so far?
    - The elderly
    - Those with auto-immune challenges
    - Persons of color
    - Those with no health insurance
    - The Poor
    - Other vulnerable populations
  - How will your decision to reopen potentially put these members and neighbors at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19?
- **Create a Plan for Reopening Your Church**
  - Regardless of when your Church reopens, it is wise to create a plan that considers these questions:
    - How will we separate people on our Church property following government guidelines (no more than 10/25 people in an area)?
    - How will we reinforce separating people during in-person church events?
    - What aspects of worship and other Church events must be changed during the pandemic (no passing of the peace, worship attendance pad, offering plate, communion practices, nursery protections)?
    - How will we clean all parts of our building during and after in-person Church events to ensure the safety of all during the pandemic?
    - If we have outside organizations that rent or use our Church building, how will we communicate with them about our reopening plan?
    - If members or others who enter the Church building contract COVID-19, will we postpone in-person Church events for the safety of all?

For these reasons, I recommend that **the Churches of the Missouri Mid-South Conference continue online worship and ministry until June 1, 2020.**

As we, the Church, prayerfully consider how long we will be in this pandemic exile, please know that I am here to support you. This guideline should not replace the difficult decision your Church Pastor and leadership must make in these upcoming days and weeks. Instead, it should offer prompting questions for your consideration. I trust the Holy Spirit will guide all of us in this time. If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to contact me at 832-326-3582 or [ginny@mmsucc.org](mailto:ginny@mmsucc.org).

Blessings,



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