

PANDEMIC DECISIONS GOING FORWARD (not backward)

Like many of you, I have observed the frustration among some within our society who have become restless with the restrictions that have been put in place. Some of these feelings are driven by personal financial uncertainty while others are the result of losing lifestyle choices that had become part of our lives. Either way, we live in a period of high stress and anxiety whether precipitated by health or financial or personal concerns. Yet, the government restrictions were imposed for the public welfare. They have and may still require some degree of personal sacrifice for the common good.

The mandated policies were to have a concerted and proactive response to “flatten the curve” in order that health systems may not be overloaded with a result of even greater danger to our public health. While the recent success of these initiatives has controlled much of the spread in our immediate area, all of southwestern Pennsylvania region remain for the time being in the “Red” zone. At some point, there will be a lessening of some of the mandated restrictions through a “phased in” plan (below), based upon various benchmarks. Maybe, it will be soon or maybe not. In either case, we will need to plan ahead.

RED	YELLOW	GREEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay safe at home • Even for essential activities, keep social distance • Wear masks in public • Only tasks/travel that is essential • Only life sustaining businesses open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressive mitigation retained (distance, masks) • Work from home if possible • Restrict in person gathering to <u>less than twenty-five</u> • Schools, Gyms, Theaters closed. • Retail and restaurants open with curbside or delivery preferred. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow CDC and PA Dept. of Health guidelines in work and social settings. • Aggressive mitigation lifted, but good health/safety practices retained. • Businesses permitted to return to prior practices. • Monitoring public health indicators to adjust accordingly.

As the leadership for congregations across Redstone Presbytery, we must recognize and prepare now to assess, discern, decide, prepare and communicate (again and again) for and with our respective congregations to whom we have been called to lead. As part of that process, I have included below some documents that may assist you in this endeavor.

They include:

- CHECKLIST OF PREREQUISITE QUESTIONS/ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED
- EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER RECOMMENDATIONS ON MINISTRY PRACTICES BASED UPON PHASES
- BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTICLES AND WEB RESOURCES THAT YOU MIGHT FIND HELPFUL AS A PASTOR AND AS A SESSION

It is important to note that the easing of mandated restrictions is not a mandate to reopen or return to prior practices (“normal”). It becomes our responsibility as leaders to make prudent and wise decisions, acknowledging that we live by faith (not fear) AND we should not tempt our God by acting foolishly. Of course, as leaders, this is more complicated than merely the decisions that you and I might make as individuals. We must discern, decide and act based upon the collective good and faithfulness of our congregations. Based upon those perspectives, I offer the enclosed documents which are grounded in the following.

- The Church is not the building, nor the expectation that ministry must take place in/through that resource.
- Ministry forms and expressions are always changing based upon contexts (even without a pandemic). These alternatives and differences neither make them inherently better nor worse.
- Decisions about the entire congregation should take into serious consideration the most vulnerable among us. In this case, the vulnerable may be based upon health concerns, but in other times and situations, there may be other forms of vulnerability (financial, emotional, physical, etc.)
- In making choices as leadership, we need to ensure that we are taking the “long term” view and not merely reacting to any given set of circumstances. We may not want to be the “early adopters” of some new fad, nor do not want to be the earliest guinea pigs in a social or health experiment.

SELECTIVE CHECKLIST FOR PREREQUISITE CONSIDERATIONS (*readiness even when various activities is permissible*)

----ASSESS, ----DISCERN, ----DECIDE, ----PREPARE, ----COMMUNICATE

Responsibilities of the Session are to be faithful to the mission of Christ in providing that: the Word of God may be truly preached and heard, the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received and Nurturing a covenant community of disciples of Christ. These responsibilities do not require or mandate a pattern or practice (even though it has been "normal"). As the leadership, how govern and guide the congregation in being and becoming a witness to God redemptive grace and mission as a community of faith, hope, love and witness.

Worship and Ministry Practices Together---

- Will you offer only virtual experiences or a hybrid of in person/virtual? How would you determine who participates in which types?
- How are the various ministries of the church being maintained through alternative means not only for the short term, but going forward?
- How will you ensure that gathering limitations be maintained?
- How will the room, fellowship hall, or worship area be structured in order to facilitate physical distancing?
- How will traditional practices of greeting, ushering, bulletins, passing of the peace, offerings, sacraments, etc. be altered to ensure physical distance is maintained and paper/trays/etc. are not "passed around?"
- How will distances at entrances/exits both at the beginning and the end of any activity be maintained?
- How will choir (or other groups) practice or be seated during any worship experiences?
- Will you use paper supplies (bulletins, etc.)? How will they be distributed safely?
- Will you use hymnals (or will you project)? How will they cleaned afterward? Will you permit families to take a "personal" hymnal home (rather than commonly used) to bring with them to worship experiences and take home to clean themselves?

Participation---

- Will only a smaller subset (musicians, etc.) gather to participate while others participate online?
- How are leaders (whether worship, bible study, etc.) equipped to facilitate effective participation by BOTH those in person or online?
- Will those who choose to participate be expected to come with masks? If they do not, will masks be provided or will they be denied?
- Will they be screened for temperatures or other symptoms?
- How will seating be structured to ensure physical distancing?
- How will those who choose not to be in-person still be able to participate without being treated as "second-class?"
- How will you seek to make sure the most vulnerable are cared for and can participate?
- Will they feel left out if you sponsor an activity that they are discouraged from participating?

Cleaning/Sanitizing---

- Is the church building adequately stocked with cleaning supplies and hand sanitizers?
- How frequently will the facilities that are used need to be cleaned thoroughly?
- Will it be cleaned both before and after? Will you need to increase hours of cleaning personnel or use outside services?
- Will the usage (which might be at different times than Sunday morning) necessitate cleaning before/after?

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Even when restrictions are not mandated, it does not mean we are mandated (or wise) to return to “normal” practices. Listed below are some of thoughts, suggestions and recommendations.

FOR WHAT IS PERMISSIBLE, NOT NECESSARILY ADVISABLE—See above	PHASE 1 (RED)	PHASE 2 (YELLOW)	PHASE 3 (GREEN)
MINISTRY AND MISSION AREAS- General	STAY SAFE AT HOME—ONLY ESSENTIAL TASKS/TRAVEL	AGGRESSIVE MITIGATION--- LIMITATION ON SOCIAL GATHERING (<25)	GOOD/NORMAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES
WORSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative (abstain from in person) worship experiences. Provide means (hard copy or assistance) for those not using technological resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative worship experiences and/or provisions for limited in person who have not/cannot participate in alternative. Provide means (hard copy or assistance) for those not using technological resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and promote both/and in person and alternative worship (for those who choose or cannot participate). Revise worship practices (in person) that could create opportunities for exposure. Educate for the common good so that those who are sick or could be compromised feel free to participate in alternative ways.
FELLOWSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative means for being able to connect regularly with one another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small group gatherings in which you are able to maintain physical distance. Responsibility for post-gathering cleaning. No common food preparation or consumption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fellowship events that are able to be conducted in physical space that permits distancing when desired. Preparation of food by those meeting health standards (gloves, etc.) and served (not buffet/common touching).
DISCIPLESHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abstain for the short term but prepare for alternative and/or hybrid options going forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide for multiple opportunities for discipleship and formation for all ages through alternative means (technology; workbooks, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple opportunities for participation in formation/discipleship (in person and/or online)
MISSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain mission critical activities that serve the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out to other mission-supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resume mission support and

	most vulnerable in our communities.	activities to look for opportunities to engage.	engagement using health and safety protocols.
LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish alternative means of participation and regular decision making that is agile and time sensitive, but works toward consensus (session). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate/ Communicate/ Implement any revisions in ministry practices going forward (short/long term). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing communication on the new practices that will be part of the new ways we “are the Church” even when permitted to be in person.
PASTORAL CARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide systematic pastoral care through phone contacts as everyone becomes part of the “home bound” population. Make sure congregants are aware of mental health and domestic abuse resources in your communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up with personal care for those particularly impacted by COVID-19 through death, hospitalization, job loss, etc. Make sure congregants are aware of mental health and domestic abuse resources in your communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduling of memorial services and other special experiences which have been delayed or deferred during the previous period. Make sure congregants are aware of mental health and domestic abuse resources in your communities.
ADMINISTRATION/ OPERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear, effective, flexible and easy ways for participants to express stewardship through contributions. Prepare health and safety protocols for future use when in person gatherings are initiated. Retain essential committee functions online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make available multiple ways (if not already available) for in person, mail and online giving. Implement health and safety protocols for in the office and in person gatherings. Initiate committee/ structures through hybrid(person/ online) means. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate necessary budget adjustments and/or special campaigns for recovery. Communicate and promote health and safety protocols throughout church facility and activities. Offer committee/ structures through hybrid means.
EMPLOYEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimize the need for employees to be at work in the office/building and limit contact of visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where possible permit work from home or minimize. Limit contact of visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resume prior work schedules and practices, but follow health and safety precautions.
WORK ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain existing health/safety guidance regarding distancing and masks. Limit any non-essential people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain existing health/safety guidance regarding distancing and masks. Limit any non-essential people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement ongoing health and safety protocols for staff and work environment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

REDSTONE MATERIALS (www.redstonepresbytery.org; <https://www.facebook.com/PresbyteryofRedstone/>)

EP Pandemic Updates/Articles;
Online Worship Resources
Emergency Grant/Loan program

WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES RECOMMENDATIONS

(<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>)

PCUSA COVID-19 RESOURCES

(<https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>)

WHAT YOUR CHURCH MUST KNOW BEFORE REOPENING (congregational survey may be helpful)

https://factsand Trends.net/2020/04/22/what-your-church-must-know-before-reopening-your-building/?fbclid=IwAR2T_xjDh_r7zf3oXT6XHiwG3MBw4OJs4UG_BzbGsTSlCgt72j2yXEcPI9s#.XqDLq46Ah94.facebook

24 QUESTIONS YOUR CHURCH SHOULD ANSWER BEFORE PEOPLE RETURN

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/?fbclid=IwAR1M6EL46lo-DZKd15gMo-PAp9-In-A-vRy9NwX6cFPDc92KZP4VkcWngr4>

CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS (summary of Tony Morgan webinar "Unstuck Group")

<https://chriseller.net/2020/the-church-after-coronavirus>

LEADING BEYOND THE BLIZZARD

<https://journal.praxislabs.org/leading-beyond-the-blizzard-why-every-organization-is-now-a-startup-b7f32fb278ff>

10 WAYS THE CHURCH WILL BE CHANGED BY COVID-19

<https://convergenceus.org/2020/04/02/ten-ways-the-church-will-be-changed-by-covid-19/>

LEADERSHIP DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

(https://ethicalleadership.nd.edu/leading-during-times-of-crisis/?fbclid=IwAR21HaXwGy5X7770ph0FYsG02C6HV39Ga6D0GULqeAljm2mijuZ_IHesAk)

SIX WAYS TO SHEPHERD WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE THE SHEEP

(https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/6-ways-to-shepherd-when-you-cant-see-sheep.html?fbclid=IwAR2_uD6Lx6kYje7EQ16g6_v3vq3TbfvPXehJVRryDhZVGuvCyN5iKdyjS5Y)