

Returning To Worship

During these unprecedented times, churches are doing their best to navigate the many challenges of COVID-19. As churches give thoughtful and prayerful consideration to reopening in-person worship services again, there are a number of concerns they should address in order to move forward as safely as possible. Before you open your doors again, we encourage you to check the Governor's website for your [state](#), and consult with your [local](#) health department, as well as following [CDC guidelines](#).

We offer these options for consideration as you deliberate the next steps for your house of worship; Insurance Board protects your ministry by offering resources to support it.



General Considerations

- Hosting in-person worship services increases a church's liability; measures to ensure safety and quality control need to be strictly followed and remain consistent.
- Recognize the population of your congregation may be considered [high risk](#), and encourage them to continue worshipping remotely.
- If you have been successful with virtual services, consider continuing them for longer. Check to see what your denominational office is advising.
- Consider hosting outdoor services; it may be easier to enforce all of the protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and safer. People can bring their own portable chairs and/or blankets to gather.
- Identify a [COVID-19 Coordinator](#) to be responsible for ensuring the policies and procedures developed by leadership to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are properly put into practice; this role should also coordinate supplies and offer ongoing support in the church office, worship services, and other activities.
- Form a Worship Team Committee to work closely with your COVID-19 Coordinator; this committee will help determine appropriate policies and procedures according to guidelines, and make sure they are consistently followed.
- The church is responsible to develop, communicate, implement, and enforce the new policies and procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Train clergy, staff, volunteers, security, greeters, and ushers on preventing the spread of COVID-19, and your new policies.
- Put your worship books and hymnals in storage for now.
- Post signs highlighting your new policies and protocols.
- Place signs strategically in highly-visible locations to remind guests that they should use face coverings and practice physical distancing whenever possible.
- Prior to return of worship services, follow [CDC](#) guidelines. Make sure all areas have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected: shampoo carpets/clean floors; sanitize pews/chairs, bathrooms (floors, sinks, toilets, faucets), doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, phones, hymnals, microphones, trash receptacles, keyboards, all items in the children's area, and any other high-touch surfaces.
- Use products that are [EPA approved](#) for use against COVID-19.
- If possible, have a professional cleaning company perform the cleaning. If you are relying on staff/volunteers, develop policies for their protection, and provide [training](#).
- A [protective mask](#) covering the mouth and nose should be worn and disposable gloves/gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.
- Communicate with your community to alert them of the details about the new policies and requirements.
- Establish a one-way traffic pattern by choosing entry and exit doors separate from each other. Use visual floor markers to identify walking flow patterns.
- Apply the same one-way pattern to your parking lot to help keep space between guests as they arrive and walk to the church. Encourage parking in an every other space situation.
- Provide hand sanitizer, tissues, and no-touch disposable receptacles near handwashing locations.
- Close off communal gathering areas to maintain proper social distancing. Block off water fountains/bubblers.
- Post signs on bathroom doors reminding members they should minimize public restroom use because of the risk; in order to maintain social distancing, only one stall/urinal should be accessible (others blocked off). Prop main door open to restroom when possible (to avoid touching door handles).

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(Acts 17:24, NRSV)



Before Each Service

- Consider every aspect of your worship service with COVID-19 in mind; adjust all practices to include safety measures that will limit transmission through touch.
- Each attendee should take their temperature before leaving home. If temperature is less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, congregant may attend service. A congregant who has a fever at or above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or is experiencing [symptoms](#) should NOT attend worship.
- Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Prop open doors, if possible, to prevent the need for congregants to touch them.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure that sanitary facilities stay operational and stocked at all times and provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed.
- Consider more frequently cleaning and disinfecting handwashing facilities that are used more often. Use signage to reinforce handwashing.
- Decide how you will maintain appropriate [social distancing](#).
- Consider using technology to display the service readings and responses, or have them available in a disposable printed format.
- Reduce seating. Churches with moveable chairs should remove some to maintain [social distancing](#), mark pews for non-use (encouraging an every other row scenario), and/or ushers may seat people.
- Decide how many people you can safely accommodate for worship service and have people sign up online to attend each service. Create a seating chart and post online; mark chairs/pews, and direct people as they arrive.
- Be vigilant about reduced crowds. Have more than one service; hold service on additional days during the week to accommodate your congregation's needs.
- There should be at least 6 feet between households attending worship services.
- A [protective mask](#) covering the mouth and nose should be worn throughout the church.
- Based on findings from the National Association of Teachers of Singing, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorus America, and Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA), along with specialists in otolaryngology and infectious disease, with specific research focus on aerosolizing of particles from the lungs through the vocal tract, [singing is strongly discouraged](#).
- Place brochures or bulletins in seats or pews for people to take with them. Remove any other literature or brochures from common areas.
- Consider what dismissal looks like in order to ensure social distancing. Use ushers to stagger departures.

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During Worship

- A congregant who develops a fever or begins to experience [symptoms](#) during worship should immediately go home. If an emergency should occur at the church, follow [American Heart Association guidelines](#) for COVID-19 and CPR.
- Pass the peace in manners that do not require physical contact: a verbal greeting, a unison spoken response, or other gestures such as a smile or bow.
- Consider suspending communion as a safety precaution. Look to your denomination for additional guidance.
- Do not pass the offering plate. Instead, offer a drop off area, or encourage on-line giving.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc.
- If a family with small children cannot ensure the ability to maintain proper social distancing, encourage them to attend virtual service.

After Worship and Other Thoughts

- Limit attendance for funerals, weddings, support groups, and any other programming. Offer them virtually as well.
- Consider having clergy hold virtual visits (by phone or online) instead of in homes or at the hospital.
- Consult and comply with all local and state guidelines regarding limits on gathering sizes.

- After each gathering, make sure all used areas have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Follow [CDC guidelines](#). Use products that are [EPA approved](#) for use against COVID-19.
- Make sure all areas have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected: pews/chairs, bathrooms (floors, sinks, toilets, faucets), doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, phones, hymnals, microphones, trash receptacles, keyboards, offering plates, and any other high-touch surfaces.
- Staff should use a [protective mask](#) covering the mouth and nose and disposable gloves/gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.
- Wash religious garments and linens after each use, at the highest water setting possible. Staff, congregants, and visitors should wear gloves when handling dirty linens.
- Assign someone to do a cleaning product inventory check to ensure ordering far enough in advance so that the church does not run out of a necessary product.
- Discontinue offering food and beverages in a communal gathering pre or post worship. Do not hold potlucks or similar family-style eating and drinking events.
- If food and beverages must be served, provide in single-serve, disposable containers.
- Consider upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, having air ducts professionally cleaned, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in worship areas, offices, and other spaces.