



INSURANCE BOARD
CLEVELAND, OH

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Reopening During COVID-19: Considerations for Church Leadership and Clergy

There are several factors to consider and risks to weigh when deciding to return to in-person worship, amid COVID-19. Insurance Board is committed to providing Loss Control resources to protect ministries and their congregants. To assist churches with their planning, Insurance Board has released a video in partnership with denominational leaders and legal experts, Heather Kimmel, General Counsel of United Church of Christ, Rev. Terri Hord Owens, the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Joyce Lieberman, Executive & Stated Clerk from Synod of South Atlantic, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Dean Rocco, Attorney from Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP, and MindMeld Studios, to help churches navigate their return.

Insurance Board has been at the forefront in providing resources to help churches through COVID-19. *“Insurance Board is grateful to our valued partners for their participation and assistance in this important video offering critical options for consideration for houses of worship across our country. Planning to reopen is a task that requires thoughtful and prayerful deliberation; this video addresses specific policy and liability concerns that can help churches navigate these unprecedented times,”* said Lisa Gonzalez, Director of Loss Control for Insurance Board.

Rev. Dr. Diane Weible, UCC Conference Minister of Northern California Nevada Conference, shared her perspective on the value of the video stating, *“When churches were faced with the decision to close buildings due to the pandemic, we recommended they follow state and local health department guidelines. The decision to open is much harder. This video offers churches a great resource for issues and procedures church leaders need to consider in caring for members and visitors and to protect the church from exposure and liability. I am grateful to the Insurance Board for the depth of information and support this resource offers.”*

As a potential added benefit, the video provides a completion certificate for each viewing, which can help satisfy training requirements mandated by certain States. In addition to protecting ministries by reducing the likelihood of COVID-19 related claims, it also provides documentation for necessary steps taken by the church to best demonstrate preparedness and precautions taken for a safe return to worship. Dean Rocco, Attorney at Law from Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP speaks further about this, *“My thoughts in putting this program together were recognizing that congregations across the country were extremely eager to get back together for worship and fellowship, and this program allows churches to return to worship thoughtfully, in a way that protects their congregants, restricts community spread and reduces the likelihood of claims against them.”*

The training video “Reopening During COVID-19: Considerations for Church Leadership and Clergy,” is available to all Insurance Board participants at no charge. There is also a companion video for staff and volunteers on “Considerations for Preventing COVID-19 in Your Ministry.” Member denominations may access the license to view the videos through our partnership with myCEcourse.com at a discounted price of \$2.50. All other ministries may access the video for the low cost of \$5.

Heather Kimmel, UCC General Counsel reinforces the importance of making a wise decision. *“Churches should focus on whether it is good ministry to hold in-person worship services during the pandemic. The Returning to Worship video helps churches assess whether they are ready to reopen and how to prepare to do it in a way that is respectful of congregants, staff, and the church’s ministries.”*

Rev. Terri Hord Owens, Christian Church Disciples of Christ, General Minister & President provides opening remarks for the video and shares her reason for participating in this project, *“It was my pleasure to provide an introduction to Insurance Board’s video. It is so important that we continue to provide accurate information to assist congregations in keeping their members safe, and connecting them with additional resources to help them make good decisions for their members and communities. We are stronger when we take care of one another. Our congregations trust the expertise of the Insurance Board, and we are blessed by the expertise and care that the IB has taken to provide this resource.”*

For information on how to access the video, visit: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/reopening-during-covid-19-considerations/>

