

We are now several months into the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the information from our first Re-Launch Guidelines from April, and the Frequently Asked Questions recommendation from May, are still current and accurate. However, we feel the need to provide an updated set of guidelines as we move into a new season of ministry.

The following updated guidelines are intended to be shared with the Re-Launch team at each church. These updated guidelines come from Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, the District Superintendents, and our Conference leadership team. Please direct any questions or comments to your district office so we can continue to address and share responses to the whole Conference.

We encourage you to share these updated guidelines with each member of your church's Re-Launch team and to schedule time to walk through them together.



BE  
INFORMED

- Know the risk factors for the virus. Frequently visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) List of Persons at Higher Risk: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html)
- Know the data for your state. (West Virginia or Maryland) Know the data for your county, and the counties around you. Our Conference borders many other states, stay informed on what is happening all around you.
- Visit Google and search “West Virginia Coronavirus case tracker” (or Maryland, or any state around you) to see current data. You can also find information there by county. Pay attention to new cases per day and your county statistics. Watch for declining numbers of new cases over an extended period before making any adjustments to your in-person gathering plans.
- Know your congregation. Poll those in your congregation regarding their expectations, fears, and concerns. Stay in communication with the whole congregation. There should be no rush to return to the building. Continuing to do worship services online or in other ways is acceptable.

**Always error on the side of caution and safety.**

**RE-OPENING**

- Continue to provide opportunities for your congregation to worship at home.
  - Stock up on cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer. If you cannot find appropriate supplies, then you should seriously consider continuing to suspend all in-person gatherings (worship services, etc.) until such supplies can be acquired.
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- Stock up on cloth masks. Consider asking church members to sew masks for use by those who need them now and for the church upon reopening.
  - Deep clean your entire church.
    - Consider shampooing carpets and pew cushions; sanitizing pews, bathrooms, light fixtures and switches, microphones, etc. using CDC approved disinfectants for the COVID-19 virus. CDC instructions for cleaning and disinfecting your facility can be found at: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)
  - Walk through your building and identify all the areas where people may touch things and make plans now for regular sanitation of all those areas once the building reopens.
  - Create plans for how to continue safe social distancing upon reopening.
  - Remove Bibles, pens, offering envelopes, and any other items from the backs of chairs or pews. Ask the congregation to bring anything they may need from home, and to take it back with them when they leave.
  - Prepare signs reminding people not to shake hands or share hugs and perhaps suggest a more appropriate non-contact greeting. (visit [www.outreach.com](http://www.outreach.com) for sign ideas)
  - Consider placing barriers to certain spaces in your sanctuary, fellowship hall, and classrooms to ensure social distancing (i.e. tape, cones, tables, removing chairs).
  - Consider attaching a plexiglass barrier on the front of the pulpit so that preaching can be accomplished without wearing a mask.
  - Plan for multi-generational worship so that families can worship together in the absence of a children's church or nursery.
  - Make a plan for what you will do if cases rise and you have to suspend services or reduce the number of people allowed to gather. Communicate that plan to your congregation now.
  - Have a plan for how you will respond if someone in your congregation is exposed to the virus and communicate that plan to the congregation now.

COMMUNICATE

- Stay in constant communication with your congregation.
  - Encourage anyone who is sick or at risk to stay home and worship with you from there.
  - Tell your congregation how you have prepared the church for their arrival. Use words such as: “cleaned” – “sanitized” – and “disinfected.”
  - Tell people the precautions you want them to take before coming to church (such as masks, hand washing, hand sanitizing, and perhaps the use of restrooms).
  - Make sure you are communicating whether or not Sunday school, small groups, and other gatherings of the church will meet in-person and the reasons behind your decisions.
  - Once you begin in-person gatherings, over-communicate the precautions you will take at your facilities to protect the congregation and guests.
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STAFF & SERVANTS

- Consider limiting volunteers/servants to those without preexisting conditions and who are under 65. Find innovative, safer ways for persons over 65 to serve.
- Consider asking clergy, staff, and servants to take their temperature before going to the church building and to stay home if their temperature is elevated.
- Require staff and servants to stay home when sick.
- Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family or household members.
- Set up flexible and possible multiple worship times and schedules to limit the number of people who must gather at any one time.
- Staff and servants who are well but are taking care of, or share a home with, a person who is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case should stay home and follow instructions from local health officials to determine when they may return.



## Non-Worship Gathering Groups

*Sunday school classes, small groups, Celebrate Recovery, etc. and community groups such as: Scouts, AA, NA, students who need internet access, etc.*

- Eliminate the use of handouts or books. Whenever possible, use online resources.
- Consider dividing your groups to maintain social distancing standards, especially if your classrooms are small.
- If your classes/groups meet in-person, have a plan to clean everything which may have been touched in all areas between uses. (doorknobs, chairs, light switches, etc.)
- Designate entrance and exit for groups and block off areas of the building so that persons do not unintentionally compromise space not designated for use by the group.
- Determine what, if any, special events you will allow to use your facilities. (i.e. weddings, funerals, community groups, etc.)
  - Any such events must comply with currently effective maximum number of participants as set by federal, state, or local officials. They must also adhere to strict social distancing and other policies as put into place by the congregation regarding temperature checks, sanitation process, and wearing masks.
  - A written and signed statement of understanding with all outside groups is highly recommended.
- If your space does not allow for social distancing and/or you cannot properly sanitize it before the event/gathering, you should continue to suspend in-person meetings of those groups.
- You might encourage groups to meet outside where possible. People could bring their own chairs, Bibles, and materials. This allows for social distancing and reduces sanitizing.
- Pay special attention to high-traffic areas. Plan for ways to reduce bottlenecks and crowded hallways.

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## Mission Trips

- We strongly recommend against offering mission trips at this time. Travel will involve a higher level of risk for some time.
- Rather than go on a mission trip, work with your pastor and/or mission team to find ways to serve in the local community. (food pantries, emergency shelters, etc.)

## Nurseries & Children's Ministries

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children two years of age and under DO NOT wear masks or face coverings. Please keep this in mind as you make decisions.
- Determine if you will continue offering children's church, classes, and/or nursery. Our recommendation is for you to not offer nursery, and in-person preschool or children ministries until your local schools open completely for all students. Even then, keep track of any school closings or movement to online education due to the spread of the virus around your community.
- Involve parents in planning to hear their concerns and gain their involvement. Be sure to communicate your plan to parents so they know what to expect.
- Consider pre-registering children (RSVP) to limit how many are in any room at once.
- Limit leaders/teachers/servants in the preschool and children's areas to those who do not have preexisting conditions and/or are not over 65 years old.
- Have extra volunteers/servants available in the preschool ministry where some children may suffer from separation anxiety after being with their parents for a long time.
- Consider adjustments to child check-in procedures to reduce contact while still maintaining security.
- Prepare and utilize a checklist of what has been cleaned and when in each room. Develop a schedule to clean and sanitize each room after each use.
- Develop a list of procedures for your servants. Host a meeting with them to discuss safety and security procedures for reopening in this environment.
- Determine what you will do about children and youth activities in the coming weeks and months. Consider new ways you can safely engage the children and youth using social media and online activities.

**NOTE:** Safe Sanctuary policies must still be maintained at all times. If following any of the above guidelines puts you at risk of violating a Safe Sanctuary policy, then you should NOT offer the class/ministry/etc. until you are able to ensure full adherence to the policy.

## Preschools and Mother’s Day Out

As a starting point—remember, most daycare centers follow a policy of mirroring the local school system’s decisions about opening and closing. That is, if schools are closed, the daycare facilities usually are too. Churches would be wise to follow the same policy. Of course, these are unprecedented times, and to provide ministry where it is needed most (e.g., to children of first responders and other essential workers), your daycare may wish to open, even if schools are closed. This should be an intentional decision based on all available information.

If a church’s daycare center decides to reopen, or to remain open, then, in order to be in compliance with applicable governmental requirements, the following practices should be instituted:

- The facility must practice enhanced sanitation and social distancing practices in accordance with CDC and West Virginia or Maryland Department of Public Health guidance, including:
  - Wash hands with soap and water.
  - Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if handwashing is not possible.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or cough or sneeze into your elbow.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Stay home when sick.
  - Stay away from people who are sick.
- Churches which operate daycare facilities must be sure to obtain adequate cleaning supplies, and they must clean their space thoroughly, prior to opening each day. Also, after closing, staff must clean again in preparation for the next day. Throughout each day, adequate staff must be available to regularly clean and sanitize the rooms where children are present, including bathrooms.
- If more rooms than usual are required to ensure 12 or more children are not housed in a single space, train all workers (whether paid staff or volunteers) on the church’s Safe Sanctuaries policy after they have received a clean background report.
- In addition, before being allowed to work in daycare centers, employees and volunteers should sign a statement attesting that, to their knowledge, they have not been in contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, and that they have adhered to all applicable “stay at home” orders and other directives and guidance.
  - If a worker, volunteer, child, or household has tested or has been in contact with someone who has tested positive, they must contact the supervisor/director of the program and a notice needs to be put out to all participants. (see “What To Do If Someone ...” section)

## **Preschools and Mother’s Day Out**, continued

- Teachers and students over the age of two are required to wear masks. Medical necessities may ameliorate this requirement to some extent, but this will be the general rule.
  - Parents and guardians should not be allowed inside any daycare facilities. Drop off and pick up must happen curb side, with workers/volunteers available to escort the children to their rooms.
  - Finally, daycare centers should be mindful of employing or engaging workers or volunteers who themselves may be vulnerable to coronavirus or other respiratory diseases.
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## **Tech Teams**

- Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, music stands, etc. after every use. Keep a record of when each item was cleaned. DO NOT use water. Rubbing alcohol or alcohol-based cleaners are best.
  - Do not have multiple people using the same microphone.
- Rotate your tech team if possible. Again, encourage those who feel sick or tired to not serve.
- Keep offering online services. Facebook may be more accessible as many people have accounts, but consider other options like YouTube for those who prefer to watch on their smart televisions.
- Consider projecting liturgies, song lyrics, scriptures, and sermon guides. Secure a CCLI license for copyright compliance if you do.
- As many churches are now offering both some version of in-person worship and some version of online worship, be sure you are focusing on both audiences as you prepare and hold worship services.

## **Choirs, Praise Bands, and Congregational Singing**

- Unfortunately, at this time it is still not safe for churches to use choirs, praise bands, or to do any in-person congregational singing of any type.
  - Many medical experts are saying now that one of the main ways the COVID-19 virus is spread is through air particles people have expelled through breathing. This danger is increased when people are speaking loudly or singing.
  - If you are having a solo singer during worship, please ensure they are more than 12 feet away from anyone else and that they are behind some type of plexiglass barrier. Also, your church needs to be aware that air particles can stay in the area for hours. So be very careful cleaning or even passing through an area where someone was singing or even speaking without a mask.
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## **Common Areas and Hospitality**

- Where possible, consider blocking off every other parking space to allow distance between vehicles and people.
- Discontinue coffee stations, donuts, and all congregational-wide meals. Temporarily disable all water fountains and using appropriate signing to communicate why.
- Place hand sanitizer throughout the church, especially near entryways.
- When possible, prop open doors as people arrive and leave. The less people touch doors the better. This can also increase air circulation.
- Where you can, identify some doors as entrance only and other doors as exit only. Place appropriate signs on these doors.
- Encourage people to bring masks from home. Be ready to provide masks for those who did not bring their own.
- Ensure that greeters and ushers practice enhanced hygiene and social distancing and that they remind worshippers to do so as well.
- Develop and communicate plans for exiting in case of an emergency to continue social distancing.
- If your restrooms are open during worship or other events, you will need to have a plan to maintain social distancing and sanitation. Post signs reminding people to wash their hands and social distance. Consider limiting the number of people at any one time and closing off every other stall. Have a plan to clean and sanitize all restrooms between services.



## Worship Services

- Continue offering as many online opportunities for worship as possible. Be aware that it may be a long time before many people are comfortable attending an in-person worship service and some may choose online worship as their preferred style.
- Ensure that any space you use is thoroughly cleaned and sanitized prior to each service.
- Adjust your worship space to create distancing among people. For example, block off every other pew, distance chairs, and encourage only those from the same household to sit together in family units.
- Ask everyone to wear a mask. Encourage them to bring their own but be ready to provide masks for those needing one. Clergy and staff should model the wearing of masks and safe social distancing for the congregation.
- Avoid handing out any materials. If possible, project all announcements or other appropriate worship elements. Consider emailing the congregation each week's bulletin and posting a copy online where you post your service. Use online attendance registration.
- Consider offering multiple services on different days and at different times to ensure the largest possible number of people can worship safely. Ask people to sign up for which service they would like to attend (RSVP) and cap attendance based on your capacity factoring in safe social distancing. Don't forget to factor in space for new guests.
- Avoid passing a plate or basket for the offering. Have stations in the church where people can leave their offerings. Look into online giving platforms and encourage people to give electronically, if you have not already done so.
- Remove hymnals, bulletins, and attendance pads. Consider not using a bulletin or sending it out via email. If you do use printed bulletins, place a copy on the seats prior to service (factoring in social distancing) and ask everyone to discard them after use or take them home.
- Assign microphones to individuals involved in worship. Do not share microphones. Sanitize all microphones after each use.
- Eliminate all forms of "greeting time." Consider offering a short, fun, no-contact method for people to greet each other and still maintain social distancing.
- Examine your congregation's unique traditions which might violate social distancing, such as circling up and holding hands for prayer or passing a birthday card around to be signed. Communicate with your congregation about how those traditions will be altered during this time.

## Worship Services, continued

- After each service, the congregation should be dismissed in an orderly way to ensure social distancing (e.g., as families are dismissed from a wedding or funeral in a recessional, etc.). Clergy and other worship leaders should leave the space in such a manner as to discourage hugs and handshakes.
- Remind the congregation to keep their masks on at all times.
- Have sanitizer wipes available near each pew or row and ask those who leave following the service to wipe down as they exit.
- During this crisis, it is essential for you to collect contact information from ALL in-person worshippers (members or first-time guests) so that you may contact them should they inadvertently be exposed to the virus by someone in the worship service.

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## Discipleship

- Like everything else, discipleship during a pandemic looks different. We encourage each pastor, laity leader, and congregation to find creative new ways to intentionally equip themselves and others to grow closer to the image of Christ this season.
- One way to approach discipleship during a pandemic is to break it down into the components of spiritual disciplines. Then focus on what one step might look like in each area. Not a hundred steps. Not a step in a dozen spiritual disciplines. Just. One. Step.
- In the book, *Celebration of Discipline*, author Richard J. Foster focuses on twelve spiritual disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.
  - Each of these may have a different look and feel pre-COVID, in-COVID, and post-COVID. But they are all still important to our spiritual journey to grow into the likeness of Jesus.
  - For example, the discipline of service in the past might have included a person serving at church as a greeter, usher, or in the children's ministry area. Maybe that specific type of serving opportunity is not available this season. However, there are certainly other ways for us to use our gifts serving in our communities.
- Have one conversation, with one person to help them discern a step they can take this season to grow closer to Christ. Meditate on that conversation. Celebrate what God is doing. Then have one more conversation. That is how movements are started.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY HAS  
BEEN EXPOSED OR HAS A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19

Do not wait for a case to become familiar with the “CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators and leaders of Community—and Faith Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019” for details on how to respond. [[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html)]

WHAT TO IF SOMEONE HAS BEEN IN YOUR BUILDING AND/OR  
COMMUNITY OF FAITH HAS BEEN EXPOSED BUT IS NOT SICK AND  
DOES NOT HAVE A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19

1. Upon being informed of the situation, ask the person to contact their health provider for guidance.
2. Contact your local health department and ask for their guidance on whether you should cancel activities and/or close the building.
3. Ask the local health department to contact those persons in your community who may have been exposed.
4. If the health department will not contact them, the church should contact them and share the following information:
  - Do not share names, but let them know that they may have been exposed to someone who may have COVID-19.
  - If the health department does not recommend closing the building and canceling events, inform them of the health department’s recommendation and procedures you are using to sanitize the space.
  - Remind them that should the case be confirmed at a later date, then activities will be canceled and the building will be closed for the length of time recommended by the health department.
5. Inform your District Superintendent of the situation.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN IN YOUR BUILDING AND/OR  
COMMUNITY OF FAITH HAS TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

1. Immediately contact local health officials and coordinate with them.
2. Ask the local health department to contact those persons in your community who have been exposed.
3. Cancel all activities and close the building.
4. Clean and disinfect the entire facilities thoroughly.
5. Contact all church staff, volunteers, members, visitors, and the people you serve to share the following information:
  - Do not share names, but let them know that they may have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
  - Inform them of the closing of your facilities and the cancelation of all events.
  - Share with them the procedures you will be using to clean and sanitize the space.
  - Let them know your communication plan to share updates including when and how ministry will continue.
6. Make decisions in consultation with local health officials about extending the closure of, or limited access to, your facilities.
7. Inform your District Superintendent of the situation.