

Tips sent to the House of Bishops from the Presiding Bishop's Office

Once the decision is made to reopen a church to in-person worship services, there are a number of considerations that should be evaluated. **Most importantly, it is essential that churches are able to keep congregant family groups 6 or more feet apart at all times, and to have all congregants wear masks.**

In addition, the White House has advised that during the next phase, vulnerable individuals and those in their households should continue to shelter in place.

The White House also advises that there should be no gatherings of more than 10 people unless appropriate distancing can be maintained, whereas the American Enterprise Institute says that social gatherings should be limited to fewer than 50 people.

The main takeaway is that social distancing of 6 or more feet apart is critical, and the smaller the group, the easier it will be to maintain.

Below are some other practical points to consider in advance of offering in-person worship.

- **Prepare your church:**
 - Deep clean your entire church including pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, stair railings and microphones.
 - Consider removing all non-essential items from the rooms so that there are fewer surfaces to touch.
 - Post signs about non-contact greetings and refraining from shaking hands or hugging.
 - Communicate with your congregation about the preparations that you have done for their arrival and that if they are sick, they should stay home and join online instead.

- **Physical distancing:**
 - Keep an online worship option for those who are vulnerable or afraid to come in person.
 - Plan seating so that people sit 6 or more feet apart (people who live together can sit together).
 - Plan for dismissing congregants in an orderly way that ensures social distancing.

- **Consider:**
 - Multiple services with a few attendees.
 - Having people sign up for those services in advance while allowing for a few new people to drop in.
 - Having a service dedicated to those who are more vulnerable with even more extensive guidelines followed or held exclusively online.
 - Creating and assigning fixed seating to maintain safe distances.
 - Holding services outside.
 - Continuing virtual worship with more leaders and a small choir.
 - Use a smaller choir – remember that choir members need to be spaced out appropriately and use masks.

- **Prevent touching:**
 - No handshaking or hugs.
 - Create new ways for your community to do non-contact greetings.
- **Prevent touching of objects that the community is accustomed to handling communally:**
 - Consider suspending Eucharist until physical distancing restrictions are significantly modified.
 - Avoid passing a collection plate but instead have stations in the church where people can drop offerings, and continue online giving options.
 - Do not hand out bulletins and remove Bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc. from pews.
 - Project all announcements and hymns on a screen instead of using handouts.
- **Encourage healthy hygiene among participants:**
 - Provide anti-bacterial dispensers at the entrance and in the worship space.
 - Require people to wear non-surgical face coverings and supply ones to those who arrive without them.
 - Place disposable facial tissues within easy reach and closed bins for used tissues.
 - Provide visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
 - Empower ushers to enforce the guidelines set out by congregational/diocesan leadership.
- **Staff and Volunteers:**
 - Consider a temperature check on all staff and volunteers, knowing that normal temperatures do not ensure that a person is virus-free.
 - Limit volunteers to those without preexisting conditions and those who are under 60 years old.
 - Instruct greeters on how to greet those arriving – no handshaking or hugs.
 - Have greeters hold doors open.
- **Consider delaying the reopening of child care services, and when you decide to reopen them:**
 - Pre-register children to limit how many are in any room at a time.
 - Limit leaders in children's areas to those with no preexisting conditions and those under 60 years old.
 - Have a list of what has been cleaned and when in each room.
 - Note that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children 2 years of age and under do not wear masks or face coverings.
- **Amenities:**
 - Decide whether to keep restrooms open based on current guidelines.
 - Do not provide coffee stations or meals until current guidelines advise that it is appropriate.
- **Frequently clean worship spaces and buildings:**
 - Clean immediately before and after all gatherings.
 - Frequently clean often-touched objects such as door knobs, light switches and stair railings with disinfectant.