

Mid-Kentucky Presbytery's "Healthy at God's House" Covid-19 Reopening Guidelines

"All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.
-1 Corinthians 10:23

"You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind and with all of your strength...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."
-Mark 12:30-31

Governor Beshear has cleared Kentucky houses of worship to reopen for in-person worship and work effective Wednesday, May 20, 2020. As Presbyterian Christians, we answer to a higher authority. Paul reminds that we must balance our individual freedom with our responsibility to and for the community. Jesus commands that love for neighbor—treating them as we would want to be treated ourselves—is paramount in all that we do.

The first question for spiritual leaders is not so much when shall we return for in-person worship, but how will we make sure that whenever we return for in-person worship that we will do so in ways that build up the body and show love for neighbor—all of our neighbors?

This document details guidelines and questions for consideration to help the spiritual leaders of congregations and ministries of Mid-Kentucky Presbytery reflect on being "Healthy at God's House."

10 "Healthy at God's House" rules for Phase 1 reengagement from Governor Beshear Beginning May 20, 2020:

- Continuing teleworking where possible
- Phased return to work (not everyone comes back to the office at once)
- Onsite temperature/health checks
- Universal masks and any other necessary personal protective equipment
- Close common areas (no break rooms or cafeterias)
- Enforce social distancing
- Limit face-to-face meetings
- Sanitizer/hand wash stations
- Special accommodations (those in high-risk groups —65+years old and those with underlying physical conditions—who don't return to work)
- Testing plan (What will happen if an employee tests positive after coming into the workplace?)

Checklist of Questions for the Church as Employer:

1. What staff can continue to telework? What additional modifications may need to be put in place to facilitate long-term telework until a vaccine is found?
2. How will you communicate with employees, and how will you phase a return?
3. How will you perform onsite temperature/health checks and yet still protect the privacy of the employee? Do you need to purchase a “thermometer gun,” or a “pulse oximeter”?
4. Will you provide masks for employees? Where will you obtain masks?
5. How will you limit face-to-face meetings? Will you still do staff meetings by video conferencing?
6. Touchless hand-sanitizer/hand wash stations where will you establish them? Do you have enough hand sanitizer? Where will you obtain items?
7. How are you caring for employees who are 65+ years old and those with preexisting medical conditions? Will you provide special work accommodations for them?
8. How will you notify your employees about the Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave Rights? How will the session/personnel committee be made aware of these new legal requirements (that include churches) through December 31, 2020?
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employee-paid-leave>
9. What is your plan for staff (14-day) quarantine should an employee test positive for Covid-19 after returning to work?
10. Contact your congregation’s insurance provider and discuss with them risk management and liability issues as pertains to the church as an employer.
11. How will you communicate to the congregation that the church doors will remain closed and locked for non-staff on weekdays during phase one?

Checklist of Questions for Church as House of Worship:

Worship

1. How is our congregation addressing the mandatory wearing of face masks?
 - a. Are we asking people to bring their own?
 - b. Are we providing them? Where are we obtaining them?
 - c. What if someone won’t wear one? Will we ask them to leave?
2. What about temperature and/or pulse oximeter checks for worshipers?
 - a. Where do we obtain equipment? And who will use it?
 - b. How do we insure confidentiality of screening information?
 - c. Do we simply notify those feeling ill to stay at home and post “stop if you feel ill” signs on the exterior doors of church?
3. What about hand sanitizing stations?
 - a. Hand sanitizer at every door? Ends of each pew?
4. What about vulnerable populations (65+ and those with underlying health conditions)?
 - a. Are we encouraging them to continue to worship digitally and not in-person?
 - b. Will we have special worship times for vulnerable populations?

- c. Will we use drive-in/drive-up worship as a safer in-person alternative to worship?
- 5. What about social distancing (72" between worshipper requirements)?
 - a. Sanctuaries with appropriate social distancing will only accommodate 25% of pre-Covid-19 occupancy. Will the sanctuary be big enough to safely accommodate worshippers?
 - b. How will the socially distanced seating be marked?
 - c. Will there need to be additional worship services to accommodate in-person worshippers? Or will there be "overflow" live streaming sites (chapels, fellowship halls) in addition to worship in the sanctuary?
 - d. Will in-person worshippers be turned away once socially distanced seating is full? Who will do this? How?
 - e. How will congregations in need of multiple services try to stagger crowds? Will worship be by reserved time only? How will this information be collected and communicated? First-come, first-served basis, or will the church assign worship times by last name or some other manner?
 - f. Would outdoor worship be a good alternative to in-person worship inside the sanctuary?
- 6. Exterior and interior sanctuary doors should remain open for the entire morning, even in inclement weather to increase air exchange from the outside and to keep people from having to touch the doors.
 - a. How will you accomplish this? Can doors be physically latched open? Volunteers with gloves?
- 7. What adjustments will you make to the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
 - a. No passing of open elements down the pews.
 - b. No intinction (dipping of bread into the cup).
 - c. Pre-filled sealed communion cups and wafers are available for purchase.
 - d. Pastor or Elder distributing bread with gloved hands and/or using tongs to people who have come forward to the table.
 - e. Pastor or Elder distributing individual cups with gloved hands who have come forward to the table.
- 8. What adjustments will you make to the celebration of Baptism?
 - a. Have parents hold the child and have the parents distribute the water as the pastor proclaims the Trinitarian formula.
 - b. What about elder sponsors?
- 9. What about congregational singing?
 - a. Vapor particles are spread profusely and are propelled for much further than 6 ft when we sing. Therefore, congregational singing during worship should be avoided?
 - b. It is uncomfortable to sing while wearing a face mask.
 - c. How can music be incorporated into worship?
 - i. Humming?
 - ii. Playing hymn tracks/videos?
- 10. What about choir?

- a. See issues with congregational singing above. No large group choirs.
 - b. What about solos, married couples/partner duets, quartets/octets with individuals spaced 10 ft or more apart in a vacant section of the sanctuary.
 - c. How can instrumental music be maximized and used in new a creative ways?
11. How will the church “pass the peace”?
- a. Remove it?
 - b. Bowing/Prayer hands/Peace sign hands with everyone staying where they are and turning to their left and right, front and back?
12. Is a physical “pass the plate” a thing of the past?
- a. There should be no passing the place: place an offering plate/box/receptable at the sanctuary exits as in Calvin’s Geneva.
 - b. Consider a giving kiosk or a dedicated iPad or “Dipjar” (www.dipjar.com)
 - c. Continue online offering, intensify promotion of online giving
 - d. Encourage a consideration of other ways that people make an offering?
13. What about children’s sermons?
- a. Probably should be discontinued if there are more than 2-3.
 - b. Can the children’s sermon be given to the whole congregation as the “children of God”?
14. What about officer ordination/installation?
- a. Laying on of hand will need to be discontinued.
 - b. Could officers and/or all the congregants be encouraged to lay on hands at a distance by raising them toward the officers during prayer?
15. What about virtual online worship?
- a. Yes, weekly digital worship should be the new normal
 - b. Given the new responsibilities on pastors for weekly digital worship, what duties will the session take away from the pastor’s job description to allow sufficient time to provide online worship?
16. What about shortening worship services?
- a. Churches with multiple Sunday morning worship services should consider shortening them to 45 minutes in order to make sure there is social distancing as one worship service ends and another begins.
17. What about door greeters and ushers?
- a. Adopt the Walmart strategy: greeters/ushers do not shake hands ever.
 - b. Make sure greeter/ushers know what the safety protocols and expectations are and how they are to be followed. Will they be taking temperatures of worshipers entering?
 - c. Train greeter/ushers so that they become the folks to orient worshipers to “how to do worship”
 - d. Bulletins, if used, should be stacked on a table. Greeters/ushers may remind worshippers to pick up their bulletins themselves.
18. What about exiting the sanctuary to insure proper social distancing?
- a. How do you need to think about getting people out safely?
 - b. No shaking the pastor’s hand.
 - c. No coffee hour.

19. Check with your congregation's insurance provider and discuss with them risk management and liability issues as pertains to the church and worshippers.

Christian Education

1. Can you insure social distancing for Sunday School classes? Will children be able to stay 6 ft. away from others?
 - a. No nursery.
 - b. Online Christian Education may be the best option to start with.
2. What are you going to do about VBS, summer camps, etc.?
3. What about youth group?
 - a. Can the youth meet in ways that permit social distancing?

Fellowship and Pastoral Care

1. Do you have a regular, systematic plan in place to connect with and check in on every member at least once every two-weeks?
2. Online fellowship groups continue.
3. Fellowship meals will probably not resume until much later.
4. How can pastors discuss openly the realities of addictions/mental illness/domestic abuse and provide appropriate referrals?
5. What about a text-in, phone-in prayer request line?

Buildings and Grounds

1. What are you doing to sanitize and clean between services and in real time?
2. What supplies do you need?
 - a. Hand Sanitizer
 - b. Face masks
 - c. Gloves
 - d. Pre-filled communion cups
 - e. Other
3. What about Sunday morning "cleaning teams" in addition to mid-week cleanings by the custodian?

Stewardship and Finances

1. Have you established and publicized online giving?
2. Have you asked members to keep up their pledge and/or give to the church?
3. Have you encouraged members who can to tithe their stimulus checks?

Mercy Ministries

1. Have you found way to adapt and continue your congregation's mercy ministries of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, etc.?
2. What new needs are arising in light of the pandemic that your congregation can actively address?