

# COVID-19 GUIDE FOR REOPENING A CHURCH BUILDING

## STAGE 1: STRICT PHYSICAL DISTANCING PROTOCOLS

Author: Dr. Mark A. Boyd

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This *guide* is written to help you through various points of consideration as your church gradually resumes the use of your church facilities. Just as “safer-at-home” orders were implemented in stages, a return to public gatherings will also be implemented in similar stages. They will begin with extreme social distancing guidelines, then move to moderate social distancing guidelines, and then to the new normal distancing guidelines. Remember to observe any local and state orders.

### • PREPARING YOUR CHURCH

- Clean, clean, and more cleaning. Make sure you have adequate resources on hand not only to do the initial cleaning, but also the ongoing cleaning between services.
  - Areas for consideration: Sanitizing the hard surfaces on pews/chairs, bathrooms, doorknobs and handles, light switches, and microphones.
  - Pay close attention to the preschool and children’s area. Consider removing nonessentials from the room to limit surfaces for potential cross contamination and remember to clean in between uses.
- Post signage about not shaking hands and doing some non-contact greetings.
  - Areas for consideration: Since people are retraining themselves to sneeze into the inside of their elbow, the “elbow bump of love” may not be appropriate anymore.
  - Consider a wave and a smile, a bow, a salute, or a double tap on the heart. Avoid anything that resembles common gang signs or inappropriate symbols. When in doubt “Google” it and make sure of any potential meaning before advocating the use of any symbols. Who would have thought that an “OK” symbol with the hands has racial undertones?
- HVAC System
  - Change out your air filters to a MERV 13, MPR 1500-1900 or FPR 10.
    - Make sure your air handlers can accommodate the restricted air flow from the additional filtering.
  - Consider turning off ceiling fans during worship times.
- Clean and sanitize between services.

### • SERVICE TIMES AND BUILDING USAGE

- Keep an online meeting option or a drive-in church option for those who may be more at risk to the COVID-19 virus.
- Consider an abbreviated schedule to minimize traffic to the bathrooms and children getting anxious.
- Use every other pew and stagger the groupings to maintain at least 6 feet of distance from every direction.
  - Mark off pews with painter’s tape and alternate between services.
- Remove chairs if appropriate to decrease sitting capacity and provide adequate spacing.
- Utilize multiple services OR be prepared for overflow into an alternate space such as a family life center, fellowship hall, etc. Add a video/audio feed into that room and adhere to the same guidelines in the main auditorium on the social distancing.
  - Auditorium seating will generally be reduced by 50-60%, so you may want to consider multiple services on Sunday, ie. 9 AM; 11 AM; 1 PM.

- Look over your membership and consider dividing them up by the alphabet instead of age to maintain cross-generational worship.
- Encourage/instruct household family members to remain together in the worship auditorium. That means children and youth should sit with their parents.
- Gradually add additional activities/programs as we progress through the Stages 2-3 in Oklahoma and in your county.
- Continue to do small groups/Sunday School in the homes or online as you are currently doing them.
- Continue suspending children and youth activities in the building under Stage 1.
- Per the Governor's request no nursery options will be available under Stage 1.
  - Everyone will understand crying babies in the worship auditorium during this time.
- **WORSHIP SERVICE**
  - Discontinue the formal meet and greet time. Discontinue having the little children gather an offering a.k.a. Penny March and passing the offering plate from person to person or having the children all come to the front for a time with the pastor.
    - Set up collection boxes at various locations in the auditorium to receive the offering. DO RECOGNIZE the various ways in which you will receive the offering: Electronic giving, mail in, offering boxes, text to give, etc.
  - Do not hand out a bulletin. Have them already placed in the seats throughout the auditorium if you must have one - this eliminates the person to person contact.
  - Discontinue any coffee stations during this time.
  - Have plenty of hand sanitizer available.
  - Suspend any choir at this time.
  - Consider removing the hymn books during this time and either singing songs that everyone knows or display the words on the screen. Once again, you are trying to minimize person to person to contact as much as possible.
  - Have your ushers assist in seating your worshipers and assist in proper spacing.
    - It would be advisable for your ushers to wear face masks and carry a personal bottle of hand sanitizer with them at all times for them to use frequently.
  - Eliminate the less important and focus on the most important elements of worship: Praise, Prayer, & Preaching.
  - Invitation Time: Have encouragers/counselors available to visit one on one in a separate area so that social distancing can be maintained.
    - Encourage a hand call during your response time. If someone needs prayer have them raise their hand while people are bowing their heads. And then corporately pray for them. Customize the hand call for what your message is asking in regard to the call to action.
    - Encourage those who need to accept Christ to come forward to visit with your appointed encourager/counselor in a separate area.
      - When counseling: Always pair up male to male and female to female and with minors observe the two-adult rule.
  - Temperature check your volunteers/ushers/leadership. Have them check it themselves with their own thermometer or use a contactless thermometer. Anyone with a temperature greater than 99.6 should stay at home.
    - Remember, older people may run a lower body temperature as their baseline so consider anything over 1 degree above their normal should remain at home or in their vehicles.
  - The pastor needs to consider not standing at the back of the auditorium and saying goodbye and shaking hands at the end of the service. Once again, you are trying to minimize person to person spread of the virus to others.