



NATIONAL APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

**GUIDELINES FOR RETURNING  
TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES**

## **GUIDELINES FOR RETURNING TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES**

**(Drafted for churches in the United States with possible application elsewhere)**

“Thank you, pastors, for what you’re doing to protect your flocks during this time.”

--Jerome Adams, Surgeon General  
White House Call for Faith Leaders (April 23, 2020)

The federal stay-at-home order expires on Thursday, April 30. In its place, the “[Opening Up America Again](#)” policy provides guidelines for the state governors to reopen commerce. This is a three-phase plan that requires a sustained drop in COVID-19 new cases. The recent White House call with faith leaders indicated that it would take six to eight weeks to get through the three phases of this plan. A real sense of normalcy will not be possible until a vaccine is in place. States, counties/parishes, and local authorities will adopt various timelines and procedures. Churches as well should begin to look at how to return to in-person worship services.

A church should begin with preparations now for the return of in-person worship services. These preparations include items such as specialized cleaning procedures, checklists, service scheduling, volunteer training, and so forth. Each community and congregation will have concerns about the safety of worship services. Pastors and church leaders should seek to hear those concerns and address them. How will we conduct church services? How many will there be? What will be done to ensure the safety of the worshippers? When will the services resume? These are many questions that need to be answered and considered thoughtfully and prayerfully.

To that end, we have threaded through federal and state recommendations to supply you with some information needed to make decisions. You can use the Table of Contents to navigate this document.

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**Please note:** At the time of this writing, it is still the recommendation of federal authorities to maintain online services or provide social distancing through drive-in services. However, as the expirations of the stay-at-home orders take place, pastors and church leaders have some decisions to make in how and when to resume in-person services.

**Decisions to make:** Pastors and church leaders must decide what is best for their congregations and communities. In the process of returning to in-person services, it's most important to make sure that the proper measures are in place to avoid having to cancel these services again. If you feel a hesitation or a sense of unpreparedness in starting the services, give it a few days and get your procedures right and assure those involved in the services and those in the community. While we all anticipate a return to normalcy, it will probably take some time to get there.

As we again return to "in-person" services, we encourage you to consider these guidelines. These are not mandates, only information for your consideration.

## PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

1. Think Spring Cleaning. The entire church should undergo a deep cleaning before and after each service. Think where will germs be transferred? Consider shampooing carpets regularly. Sanitize pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, and microphones.
2. Use proper chemicals and disinfectants as directed. Here is the [EPA list of approved COVID-19 disinfectants](#).
3. Give close attention to the preschool and children's areas. Remove any soft surface or nonessential item to limit possible surfaces for contamination and make it easier to disinfect. Refer to the separate preschool/children section for more information.
4. Remove loose articles in the church: cards, pens, brochures, etc.
5. Signs are an easy way to communicate without seeming punitive. These are some sign ideas for the church (source: [www.outreach.com](http://www.outreach.com), and [www.mydoorsign.com](http://www.mydoorsign.com)). Let people know that it's not rude just to wave.
6. Prepare the room by placing some sort of indicators, stanchions, or signage showing how people should enter, exit and where they can sit. Tape off chairs, remove chairs, use cones, etc. to indicate the distance needed. See scheduling services for more discussion.
7. Communicate with the congregation in advance by the conventional means how you have prepared the church for their return. Share with them that you've obeyed the guidelines to make the worship service clean and safe. Also, remind members that if they are sick, then they should not be present and can join online instead.



## SCHEDULING SERVICES

1. The present online service option you are offering will probably remain a part of your future outreach. This will also be beneficial for those who are concerned about their health. Additionally, most churches that have done these online services the past few weeks have seen an increase in their online engagement. You may wish to capitalize on this in the future.
2. How many people can you seat and comply with social distancing requirements? Computing this a bit complex since family members in the same household can be closer together. Other variables also exist. But, let's do the math here:
  - Current Social Distancing Requirement: 6 feet in all directions.
  - Square footage required for one person: 113 square feet ( $6 \times 2\pi r$ )
  - Variables: Single Adults 25%
  - Family multiplier: Avg Family size of 3.14 at 75%.
  - Per the table below, for a 5,000 square foot sanctuary seating area, the number of people could range from 44 to 94 depending upon the family composition and seating diagrams.

### Calculation of Seating Capacity

*Social distancing of 6 Feet*

*(25% single adults, average family size, children in sanctuary)*

Sanctuary Square Feet (Less platform)	Est Minimum # of People (Sq Ft/113)	Est Single Adults 25%	Family Members	Family Multiplier *	Est Maximum # of People
3000	27	7	20	2.5	57
4000	35	9	26	2.5	74
5000	44	11	33	2.5	94
7500	66	17	49	2.5	140
10000	88	22	66	2.5	187
15000	133	33	100	2.5	283
20000	177	44	133	2.5	377
25000	221	55	166	2.5	470
50000	442	111	331	2.5	939
75000	664	166	498	2.5	1411

3. Your calculations may indicate the need for multiple services to accommodate both your church and guests. A practical way to do this is to use a digital platform like Facebook events or Planning Center to permit people to sign up for the service they wish to attend.
4. To host multiple services requires multiple cleanups. Allow ample time to do a turnaround on the facility. You may wish to consider having one or more of the services on another day, such as Saturday, to provide the time needed to clean.
5. One suggestion is to have a service for seniors since they are the most vulnerable. Yet, that carries its own risks. Perhaps a better alternative is the online service.
6. An ample supply of volunteers is needed. For the time being, you may wish to avoid using anyone who is 65 years of age or older except in a service devoted to that age group. Also, avoid using anyone who is sick or showing signs of becoming ill.

## WORSHIP SERVICES

1. Take time to celebrate the return to in-person worship services. Maybe do a “Comeback Service.” Celebrate the church “heroes”—those who have given themselves during this time. Encourage testimonies of healing and provision.
2. Consider “worship only” services for the entire family for the short-term.
3. Those from the same household can sit together. Consider a slide on the screens explaining spacing requirements and social distancing.
4. As tempted as you are to hand out materials, avoid doing this. Use the screens or digital platforms for the communication of needed information.
5. Avoid shared microphones on the platform.
6. Offerings: Continue offering online giving options. Have places where people can physically drop their offerings instead of passing the plate.
7. Determine a unique way for people to greet others in a no-contact way. Be sensitive to anyone’s concerns about members who insist on embracing people.
8. Altar services are challenging in a social distancing environment. Of course, there should be a way people can request and receive prayer. We believe people can respond in faith to the preached Word. Seek to find ways to accommodate this response while also complying with social distancing guidelines.
9. Thoroughly clean the pulpit and platform equipment after every use.
10. Create a plan to dismiss people in an orderly way to ensure there is social distancing. You may choose to designate separate doors for entrances and exits.

## HOSPITALITY ISSUES

1. Restrooms: If you permit the use of restrooms during the services, then you will need to limit the occupants. You will also need attendants to clean the restrooms systematically—post signs as well about the importance of washing hands with guidelines for doing so. If you don't think you can allow restroom usage, then it may not be time to return to the building.
2. Do not hand out bulletins or any other items. Nor should people be allowed to pick them up at various locations. If you have something you want to be distributed, do it digitally or have a parking lot person with gloves leave it on windshields.
3. We recommend no food or beverages during this time in service. As time passes, these can be reintroduced.
4. Have plenty of hand sanitizer throughout the church. Look at the above-referenced EPA guidelines for the proper sanitizing solution.
5. Be mindful of air circulation and fragrance in the spaces. Keep air moving and the spaces smelling clean and fresh.
6. Based on individual state requirements, masks may be needed. Have a supply of masks and gloves on hand even if not required for those individuals without access to them. This will increase comfort levels.
7. Based on individual state requirements, a procedure to check the individual temperatures of worshippers may be necessary. Communicate such provisions to the congregation in advance.
8. In all scenarios, no one sick or exhibiting symptoms of the virus should attend an in-person service.

## **GREETERS AND VOLUNTEERS**

1. Parking lot attendants should space vehicles as much as possible with traffic cones, signage, sawhorses.
2. The security team should be in place. It is highly possible that holding services will attract guests, but perhaps some unwanted attention too.
3. Train the Ushers and Greeters how to greet post-quarantine: no handshaking or hugs.
4. Doors should be propped open or have the greeters hold them open.
5. Greeters and other volunteers should be able to answer questions on procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Train them beforehand, if possible. To make their job easier, communicate the methods and systems to the church in advance.
6. If the restrooms are open, ask greeters or other volunteers to monitor these to limit occupants and remind people to wash their hands.
7. A way to assure congregants is to have a temperature check on all staff and volunteers before service. (Some states may require this of congregants as well).
8. A designated person should be available to tend to anyone identified as sick. A procedure should be in place to report a COVID-19 attendee to the authorities. Follow the current [Center for Disease Control guidelines](#). (New guidelines are posted periodically).
9. Team members should be sensitive to the emotional state of people they encounter. If they note people who seem overly upset, emotional or distraught, this should be communicated through team leaders to the pastoral team. Emotional health is challenged during such a time as this.

## CLASSES & SMALL GROUPS

1. As recommendations come from returning to in-person services, one of the blessings can be small groups and classes. These are easy to manage during the week with ample space and distancing. During the weekend services, however, this may prove more difficult. You may consider having these at other times.
2. Some entities are recommending that people enter the building and go straight to their seats in the sanctuary. The idea is to limit as much foot traffic and possible connections.
3. Consider when you wish to have classes. You may choose another day of the week, and you may decide to have them offsite. Or, you may prefer to continue having them with Zoom calls until the social distancing requirements ease.
4. If one of your groups is very large, you may create two groups to maintain the requirements.
5. If you do have classes, please clean the doorknobs, water fountains, and other high traffic areas in between uses.
6. Review the materials taught during this time. In such stressful times, people can begin to share personal angst and misfortune that may not be what you wish taught. You may also encourage a prayer and praise time for each small group or class.
7. We should continue to build the community that appeared during the shelter-in-place season. There is a high likelihood that people who may not yet be willing to meet in a worship service would be comfortable in a smaller group.



## PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN

1. This area represents the most challenging decision in returning to in-person services. While the convenience of childcare and the opportunities for children to learn are significant factors for young families, you may determine this to be impractical until some social distancing requirements ease. It is being recommended by some jurisdictions to suspend these ministries unless the church can comply with the [latest CDC guidelines](#).
2. If you're in a jurisdiction that requires masks: children may be frightened by this, and authorities advise children under two to [refrain from wearing masks](#). So perhaps a good rule of thumb is if you have to wear masks, it's too soon to have your preschool and children areas open. Plus, it will be challenging to keep children apart.
3. Rather than make a hard-and-fast rule at the outset, you may consider not opening preschool and children on the first Sunday back. You can then monitor it week by week. Some churches have already said they would reopen the preschool and children areas when public schools open.
4. If you do choose to have preschool and small children programs, consider preregistering children to limit how many people can be at the room at any one time.
5. Volunteers for the preschool and children's areas should not have pre-existing conditions. As with all other volunteers, each should have a temperature check. Extra volunteers should be available to help in preschool and nurseries. Separation anxiety could be a real issue.
6. Parents should not enter into the children's area. They should drop the children off and pick them up at the welcome desk.
7. Prepare a checklist for each item to be cleaned in each room. Provide space on the list for the person cleaning to indicate when each item was cleaned. These should be reviewed and filed.
8. Develop a more specialized list of procedures for your volunteers. Train them in advance using Zoom.

## **WORSHIP TEAMS**

1. Praise & Worship Teams: You may wish not to use full teams. Consider rotations. Do not share microphones. Members who feel sick should not attend. Include temperature checks.
2. Choir: Some of the more acute outbreaks have taken place with choirs. You may wish to avoid having choirs for the interim. Consider using smaller groups in slowly reintroducing choirs to the service schedule. For all singers, space members out appropriately. Avoid the use of choir robes during this time since each use requires cleaning.
3. Musicians: Space out the musicians. Each musical instrument requires sanitization after each usage.
4. Wipe down music stands, mike stands, microphones, and instruments after each use.
5. Dismiss platform personnel in a manner to preserve social distancing.

## **TECH/PRODUCTION TEAMS**

1. Prepare detailed cleaning schedules noting items to be cleaned and when each is cleaned. Include microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, cameras, etc. after every use. Use alcohol-based products to clean.
2. Consider rotating your tech team if possible. Those individuals sick should be encouraged not to attend. Include temperature checks.
3. Continue online services. Consider options like Facebook, YouTube, and Roku.
4. Consider adding text for those who cannot hear or adding interpreters. (Be sure to secure a CCLI license for copyright compliance.)