



Guidance for Returning to Places of Worship

This document provides guidance on best practices and considerations for faith-based organizations organized in the following categories:

- Preparing Place of Worship
- Service Times and Locations
- Worship Services
- Amenities
- Staffing and Volunteers
- Sunday School/Small Groups
- Preschool/Children
- Choirs and Orchestra
- Tech Teams
- Masks/Cloth Face Coverings

Know the risk factors for the virus. This can help faith-based organizations make decisions on staffing, volunteers, and whether you will return sooner or later. For example, those with preexisting conditions and those over 65 years old are at a higher risk of experiencing worse symptoms than others if they contract the virus.

PREPARE PLACE OF WORSHIP

1. Deep clean your entire building. Where will germs be transferred? Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, and microphones.

2. Use an [EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses and follow manufacturer's instructions for use and contact time](#).

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces throughout the day and at closing.

- Remember items that might not ordinarily be cleaned daily, such as doorknobs, light switches, countertops, chairs, cubbies, and playground structures.

3. Pay attention to the preschool and children's areas. Consider removing everything nonessential from the room to limit surfaces for potential contamination and do a thorough cleaning in between uses. Please see the preschool/children section for more information to consider.

4. Remove Bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc., from the backs of chairs/pews.

5. Post signs about not shaking hands and doing non-contact greetings. You can promote the hashtag #itsoktosmileandwave.

6. Consider blocking off areas in your sanctuary or classrooms to ensure social distancing. Some ideas including using tape and cones, removing chairs, etc. to indicate appropriate distances needed.

7. Inform your congregation through flyers on the doors, email, and social media about how you have prepared the place of worship for their arrival. Be sure to use the words "clean, safe, and mindful of health needs and issues in preparation for a non-touch experience" or something similar.

8. Ensure your congregation knows that if they are sick, they should not be present and can join online instead.

SERVICE TIMES AND LOCATION

1. Keep an online meeting option for those who are afraid or unable to attend your service in person. Many places of worship have seen a spike in engagement since their online presence has increased. Capitalize on it!

2. You can offer multiple services to encourage a greater chance of social distancing. One way to ensure your services are evenly spread is to have people sign up for a service. You can use Facebook events and have people indicate which event they'll attend.

3. Remember that if you have multiple services, you will need to clean between each service. You can shorten the service time to help with the timing of cleaning thoroughly. Some places of worship are moving to having multiple services during the week to allow for cleaning in between service times.

4. Determine how many volunteers you have available to assist. Limit volunteers to those who do not have preexisting conditions and those who are under 65 years old.

WORSHIP SERVICES

1. Space out participants. If your people are from the same household, they can sit together. Consider spacing out other groups. See the preparation section.
2. Avoid handing out bulletins, and instead project all announcements on screens.
3. Change the way you offer communion. Avoid passing a plate or bowl. LifeWay.com offers combined elements of communion that can be picked up as people enter – but make sure that people are not picking from a deep bowl.
4. Avoid passing microphones on the stage.
5. Continue offering online giving options. Have stations in the building where people can drop offerings instead of passing a plate.
6. Come up with a fun way to greet others in a no-contact way.
7. Clean the pulpit after every use.
8. Consider dismissing in an orderly way to ensure there is social distancing.

AMENITIES: COFFEE, BULLETINS, AND HAND SANITIZER

1. Restrooms: You must decide whether you will allow bathroom usage. If you don't think you can allow it, then it may not be time to return to the building.
2. Do not hand out bulletins. Do not allow people to come by and pick them up out of stacks.
3. Avoid coffee stations, donuts, or groups meals at this time.
4. If you choose to keep your restrooms open, post signs about washing hands in bathrooms with appropriate guidelines to doing so.
5. Supply hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol throughout the building.
6. Supply masks for those without one to increase comfort levels.

STAFF: GREETERS AND VOLUNTEERS

1. Limit greeters and volunteers to those who do not have serious underlying conditions and to those under age 65 years old.
2. Provide security and enlist ushers to be both inside and outside greeters. Instruct them on how to greet postquarantine: NO hand shaking or hugs.
2. Ensure doors are propped open or have the greeters hold them open.

3. Greeters and volunteers should be able to answer questions on procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Provide training beforehand.
4. If your bathrooms are open, have greeters monitor the bathrooms to ensure hands are washed and social distancing is followed.
5. Consider a temperature check on all staff and volunteers.

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUPS

1. Consider whether you will have Sunday school or small groups (see previous point). Make sure you are communicating if and when these classes will resume.
2. Consider dividing your groups to maintain the social distancing standards. Also allow small groups to use the building on different days/nights if you choose to meet in person.
3. If you do have class, clean the doorknobs, water fountains, and other high traffic areas in between uses.
4. If you do not have class, provide an outline for your teachers and leaders to continue engagement for your groups. This is still an excellent time to build classes and community.

PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN

1. Children 2 years of age and under should not wear masks or face coverings.
2. Pre-register children to limit how many are in any room at a time.
3. Limit leaders and teachers in the preschool and children's areas to those who do not have serious underlying conditions and to those under age 65 years old.
4. Provide extra volunteers to help in the preschool ministry where some children may suffer from separation anxiety after only being with parents for a long time.
5. Have only one-person handle child check in stations and do not pass the check-in device.
6. Parents/guardians should drop off children at the check-in station to limit the number of visitors entering the preschool and children's areas.
7. Develop a check list to document what has been cleaned and when in each room.
8. Develop a list of procedures for your volunteers and provide training in advance.

CHOIRS, ORCHESTRAS, PRAISE TEAMS, BANDS, ETC.

1. Praise Teams: Do not use the full team. Consider rotations. Assign microphones and use the same one every time.
2. Choir: Consider suspending choir practices as forceful breathing and exhaling can expel the virus further if someone is infected. However, you could consider using smaller numbers as you reintroduce choir to the service. Also, space members out appropriately (consider using a diamond pattern with six feet of spacing between members).
3. Orchestras: Keep parts to a minimum and ensure the orchestras are spaced appropriately. Encourage brass players to bring their own towel to catch spit so it doesn't land on the carpet.
4. Consider not using choir robes as space for robe changing may be limited. Robes should be washed after each use.
5. Wipe down music stands after each use.
6. Have procedures for staggered arrival and dismissal to allow social distancing.

TECH TEAMS

1. Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, 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.
2. Rotate your tech team if possible. Again, encourage those who feel sick or run down to not come into the service.
3. Keep using the online services.
4. Add in text on screens through projectors.

MASKS/CLOTH FACE COVERINGS

1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
2. Cloth face coverings may slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.
3. Certain groups should NOT use cloth face coverings: this includes children under age 2, or anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

4. Masks/cloth face coverings should be worn correctly: they should cover both nose and mouth, fit snugly against the sides of the face, and you should be able to breathe easily.

Resources

[Tips for Coping with the Stress of COVID- 19](#)

[Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

[CDC: Faith-Based Organizations Checklist](#)

[Balm in Gilead: COVID-19 What the Faith Community Needs To Know](#)

[Georgia Baptist Church: Example of Guidelines for Reopening**Your local county health department can assist by providing cloth masks, as supplies allow.**](#)