

Guidelines for Re-Engaging in Public Religious Gatherings

Special Thanks to: Citizens for Community Values, The Ohio Ministry Network, and The Joseph Council for making this resource available as a model for others.

We all recognize the need and desire to resume gathering together in houses of worship. No doubt, it will bring us joy to resume in-person fellowship and spiritual encouragement. Prudence suggests that the manner in which you begin to re-engage with public worship services should remain in thoughtful alignment with the guidelines provided by national, state, and local health officials.

Guiding Principles

The following are some of the factors that should be considered:

- The safety of your members and the community.
- Holy wisdom on fellowship and gatherings
- Our public witness
- The prayerful wisdom of faith leaders.
- The particular needs and circumstances of your local congregation.
- The guidance of your insurance company and legal counsel.
- The latest recommendations/orders from the CDC and governmental authorities.
- Communication Strategy
- With your team of leaders, outline a strategy for how you will communicate your upcoming plans. Keep in mind the following perspectives:
 - Guidelines and recommendations are being updated continually. It's important for your people to be fully informed of your plans and protocols via email, website, and phone calls.

- Some will be thrilled to meet again, as soon as possible. Others will feel that a “wait and see” approach is more fitting. Choose your words as carefully as possible when conveying your plans.
- As sensitively as possible, help families with young children, senior citizens, those who are at risk, etc., to understand why others in your congregation will reasonably have concerns about their attendance. For example, some parents will be disappointed and concerned if other young children come near their own while in the service. See more communication steps in the sections below.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

If you decide to resume gathered worship services, there are a number of resources available to you to access personal protection equipment (PPE) and sanitization needs.

The Ohio Manufacturers Association has a website for organizations to order small quantities of PPE: [RepurposingProject.ShareTribe.com](https://www.repurposingproject.com). There are likely other resources in your area.

Template for Re-Engaging in Public Religious Gatherings

The following document is not legal or policy advice. This phased-in approach is offered as a consideration for those desiring to resume public worship. Consult your legal counsel and insurance company for explicit recommendations.

Phase I

Possible Marker: After Stay-at-Home orders are lifted or amended

Days Leading Up to Service (s)

1. Check with your general liability insurer, and the latest from the CDC, State Department of Health, local health commissioners, etc.
2. Develop tentative re-entry schedule with team of leaders
3. Communicate preparations and expectations via Facebook, website, video, and email.
4. No youth or children’s classes; no nursery
5. Encourage CDC recommendations (masks, washed hands, hand sanitizer, etc.).
6. Advertise adjustments below
7. Encourage elderly, ill, and at-risk groups to stay home.
8. Consider alternative service for healthy individuals 65 and older.

9. Consult this resources from the your State's Department of Job and Family Services for guidance on how to care for and protect children and youth
10. Continue online/alternate worship experience
11. Post signage of protocols outside and inside
12. To limit crowd size, consider adding services to allow for staggered seating.

13. Consider, for example, a system with one service for households A-M, and another for households N-Z.

Day of, Before Service

1. All attendees take temperatures before arriving. Temp Staff, Greetings and Volunteers
2. Sanitation teams begin wiping bathrooms, door handles regularly
3. Greeters present while standing 6-10 feet from doors
4. Prop opens all doors to limit touching door handles
5. Coffee stations and cafes should remain closed at all times
6. Supply masks upon entry and hand sanitizer through the building, if available
7. Closed signs on kids' rooms and nursery with those doors locked
8. Institute staggered seating requirements
9. Ushers maintain distance while guiding people to seats
10. Live streaming to other room(s) as needed.

During Service

1. No youth or children's classes (children stay with family)
2. Do not direct people to shake hands, hug, etc., as you might normally
3. Encourage only family/household units to sit together
4. Announce and observe latest social distancing protocols

5. Platform participants model social distancing while avoiding sharing mics, instruments, stands, etc.
6. Service length should be shorter than normal (e.g. 60 minutes or less)
7. Minimize need for restrooms
8. Consider emphasis on group experience such as prayer and worship
9. No offering plates passed; reference online giving or provide stationary open receptacle without handles
10. Utilize screens or apps instead of hard copy bulletins and connect cards
11. Pre-packaged communion served by ushers wearing masks and gloves
12. To all extent possible, no laying on of hands or holding hands, etc.

After Service

1. Structured dismissals (e.g. by rows or sections) allowing people to leave in smaller groups and go outside (no congregating in lobby)
2. Consider positioning video camera outside to later post and share uplifting stories on your Facebook page or website
3. Sanitize all surfaces, hymnals, and other areas.

Phase II

Possible Marker: When your State Approves Community Daycares to Open

1. Observe Phase I Protocols
2. Nursery resumes; other in-person ministries resume based on comfort level of leaders
3. Consider alternative service/location for those who may be at greater risk
4. Be sure to deep clean all surfaces and toys between services
5. Consider restricting number of children in each class

6. Consult resources from your State's Department of Job and Family Services, including their recommendation to keep a ratio of 6 children to one adult in each classroom.

Phase III

Possible Marker: When your State Lifts Restrictions on Large Group Gatherings

1. Service schedules cautiously return to normal
2. Observe updated CDC, federal, and state guidelines as warranted
9. Maintain readiness to return to prior phases as warranted.

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