



California-Pacific Conference

The United Methodist Church

PLAN DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL CHURCHES

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Methodism began as a movement, not as a church or denomination. It was a renewal movement where our founder, John Wesley, took church ‘out of the building’ and into the living rooms and outdoor venues. Wesley famously declared, “The world is my parish.”

The church is not a building. Our ministries have not been closed. We are not prevented from living out our mission because of the stay-at-home limitations of this moment of pandemic. News headlines that frame this issue too often misunderstand the fullness of what it means to be the church.

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We make disciples as we:

- proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather persons into the body of Christ;
- lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;
- nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley’s Christian conferencing;
- send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and
- continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ. (Book of Discipline, 2016, ¶212.)

In this time of global pandemic we are again, of necessity, extending ministry beyond the walls of the church in ways we had not thought of before. We are being the church on Zoom, Facebook, Instagram, by phone calls and text messages... And so as we reimagine the future of ministry, we begin by acknowledging that many churches have *already embraced* a dramatically different way of being in ministry in this time. Countless numbers of paid and unpaid people have ‘bent over backwards’ to serve their communities faithfully, learning new skills—risking mistakes and outright failure—all in an effort to be in ministry in ways we could not have imagined at the onset of 2020. These efforts demonstrate a heartfelt desire to serve, heal, teach, and bless, so that others may live more abundant lives.

We also want to acknowledge that the diverse communities of our Annual Conference have a long history of figuring out how to be the church, even when it wasn’t easy or when the familiar forms weren’t accessible. We’ve adapted our worship so it speaks in many languages and makes sense in the varied cultures of our local churches; our Church includes people who have been marginalized by our culture and even our church structures, who for generations have demonstrated that the Holy Spirit is still at work in our midst, with creativity and resilience. We can testify that the life of the Church continues nonetheless, even when established forms don’t work or aren’t available.

Though none of these core activities of our mission is restricted to our buildings, many of the familiar ways we have lived out this mission have happened in our buildings. Our facilities are a resource that helps us be the church. Not being able to welcome people into our physical doors has been difficult. We look forward to when we will be able to open our doors again.

Even as we consider what re-gathering for on-site, in-person ministries may mean, we are invited to continue embracing anew, that our parish is neither contained nor constrained within the perimeter of our campus. In this time of pandemic, we accept our responsibility to make sure we are doing our part to tend to the health of our whole community. We look to science and governmental leaders to provide us with greater understanding of how we can assist in reducing the threat of COVID-19. We know our decisions have an impact on our congregation members, and also on the broader community. We cannot ignore the disproportionate costs borne by communities of color, the elderly and the poor in this pandemic.

Before we are able to attend to the ordinances of God, we must do good. Before we are able to do good, we must first do no harm. Let us be guided by these simple rules.

PHASES OF RE-OPENING

These phases are intended to parallel alongside the state reopening plans publicized in both Hawaii and California. When a state moves from one phase to another, this is when—in consultation with local church leaders, in line with applicable local guidelines, and with the approval of the District Superintendent—congregations may be able to move to their next planned phase. Please note that the information contained in this document is subject to change as our understanding of science, medicine, and best practices may change.

Phase 1 – This is our most restrictive phase, with only essential businesses and services available in communities. There is major disruption in what has been “the norm.” In this phase, nearly all face-to-face contact is eliminated except for immediate household members. Worship takes place exclusively online, and small groups of 5 or fewer are permitted to livestream or record worship while practicing physical distancing and best hygiene practices. Only essential services are offered on campus, and all other ministries are virtual.

Phase 2 – Restrictions are somewhat reduced with more businesses and services available. Significant disruption to “the norm” is still in place. Worship remains exclusively online, though as many as 10 people may be permitted to livestream or record worship. Physical distancing and hygiene practices are both essential and required. Essential services continue with some additional access to church buildings following applicable guidelines. Virtual allowances for higher-risk persons are essential.

Phase 3 – This phase may be seen as preparatory for the “new norm.” Disruption is still noticeable, but reduced. In-person worship may resume alongside continuing virtual solutions for high-risk individuals. Requirements include physical distancing, face coverings, hygiene practices, and limited to 25% of capacity or 50 people in a room (whichever is lower). Holy Communion, live singing, and shared meals are still restricted. Some ministries may return in-person with these same limitations.

Phase 4 – This phase begins the new thing that God calls out of this experience. In-person worship may continue, and should do so alongside continued virtual options. High risk persons are invited to join at their discretion. Local context may suggest continued physical distancing or other restrictions. Holy communion may resume with hygiene practices, though live singing may still be restricted. This should not be seen as going “back to normal,” but a continuing practice of stepping forward into newness.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

High Risk Individuals – Per CDC.gov, these are persons who are 65 years or older, who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility, and persons with underlying medical conditions.

Physical Distancing – Per CDC.gov, this is the practice of keeping space between yourself and those who live outside your home. Best practices include: staying at least 6 feet (or 2 arms' length) from others; do not gather in groups; avoid crowded places/mass gatherings.

Small Groups – Small groups are any gathering of people in ministry. This could include Bible studies, Sunday School (including children), fellowship (including UMYF), musicians and/or choirs, and more.

Community Outreach – Any outward facing community service or outreach including food pantries, community meals, shelters, clothing distribution, and more.

Spiritual Care – Usually one-on-one meetings with a Pastor or other spiritual leader for counseling, consultation, spiritual direction, and more.

Maximum Group Size – The maximum number of people including children and leaders who gather in one location at any given time. This includes worship, committee meetings, staff meetings, or other events.

PROCESS FOR A LOCAL CHURCH TO DEVELOP A PLAN

The process for developing a re-opening plan for a local congregation is:

1. Establish a task force or team of leaders in the congregation to work through the details required for a comprehensive plan. Include the Pastor, persons who can mold the process of the plan, and people who can clearly and effectively communicate the plan in a written format. *For those congregations experiencing an appointment change, both the outgoing and incoming pastor must be actively invited into this discernment.* In addition, consider a way to present your plan to your congregation to clearly represent what can be expected and benchmarks along the way.
2. A finalized plan must be approved by the Administrative Council or equivalent.
3. The approved plan must be submitted to the District Superintendent before any part may be implemented. Only when approved by the Superintendent may churches fully communicate and implement this plan for re-opening, *and the Superintendent must be consulted before moving to each phase in the plan.*

BASIC VISUAL CHART TO PLAN RE-OPENING

The following chart was modeled after similar charts available from local churches and congregations across our denomination. The phases noted in this chart are intended to follow the phases of re-opening that have been announced by the states of California and Hawai'i. This chart is intended to be a starting point for your congregation and does not include all ministries and does not reflect our diverse ministry contexts. An editable version of this form will be available for local church use. Finally, please note the process above before moving from one phase to the next.

| Phase | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| High Risk Individuals | Stay home, stay healthy | Stay home, stay healthy | Stay home, stay healthy | Public interaction with authentic assessment of risk; maintain physical distancing as appropriate |
| Worship | Virtual worship with minimal support staff; must maintain physical distancing | Virtual worship with minimal support staff; may include drive-in worship; must maintain physical distancing | Virtual plus in-person worship up to 50 people incl. weddings and funerals with physical distancing and face coverings; may include outdoor worship; no communion, live singing, or shared meals | Virtual worship continues with larger gatherings resuming; may include physical distancing and face coverings; live singing and communion may still be restricted |
| Fellowship Hour | Virtual or none | Virtual or none | Virtual or none | Resumes with safe food handling; may still require physical distancing |
| Small Groups | Virtual gatherings only | Virtual gatherings only | Virtual gatherings encouraged; limited in-person gatherings with physical distancing. | Gatherings may resume with allowances for virtual participation |
| Community Outreach | Critical services only; community meals to-go only; following safety protocols | Critical services only; community meals to-go only; following safety protocols | Critical services only; community meals to-go only; following safety protocols | Broader services; in-person services with allowances for to-go options for vulnerable persons |
| Spiritual Care | Virtual only | Virtual only | Virtual or in-person with physical distancing and face coverings | Virtual or in-person; physical distancing and face coverings with vulnerable persons |
| Office | Public office closed; staff works from home with limited exceptions; email and voicemail communication with public | Public office closed; staff works from home with limited exceptions; email and voicemail communication with public | Public office closed except by appointment; staff may work in office with physical distancing; communication by phone and email with public | Public office open; staff expected in person with physical distancing and exceptions based on risk level |

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

Local Church Name: _____
Task Force Created: Yes Date: _____
Plan Approved By Administrative Council: Yes Date: _____
Plan Approved By District Superintendent: Yes Date: _____
Implementation Completed By (Date): _____

CHECKLIST

Physical Distancing

- Have you designated seating areas with 6 feet of space? (Please Describe)
How many maximum parishioners can you hold in your sanctuary _____
What is your average worship attendance? _____
(*You must limit your space to 25% of its capacity*)
- Plan in place for any who show up beyond this maximum (Please Describe)
- Do you have clearly marked entrance and exit plans? (Please Describe)
- Do you have some kind of sign-up model for anticipating numbers? (Please Describe)
- Do you have a registration of persons in case of emergency follow up? (Please Describe)

The Worship Experience

- Do you have the ability to meet outdoors if possible? (Please Describe)
- Will you continue some form of virtual worship for those who cannot attend?
- Do you plan to make any recommendations or modifications for vulnerable populations? (Please Describe)
- Will you not use paper worship bulletins?
- Will you not allow public singing?
- Will you not pass offering plates or have any physical offering of any kind?
- Will you eliminate or restrict congregational responses/recitations?
- Will you not allow food or eating on the property?
- Do you have a plan for Holy Communion without touching the elements and observing Social distancing? (Please Describe)
- Do you have a plan for Baptism with minimum touching and observing Social distancing? (Please Describe)
- Do you have a plan for your children and youth groups? (Please Describe)

Cleaning & Sanitizing

- Have you deep-cleaned your facility?
- Do you have enough cleaning supplies in inventory?
Do you have a disinfection plan for high-touch surfaces such as chairs, railings, and seating cushions (Please Describe)
- Do you have a plan for disinfection of the sanctuary that is sustainable? (Please Describe)

Health And Personal Hygiene

- Do you have enough face coverings, gloves, other PPE required for employees visitors & volunteers in inventory?
- Do you have enough hand sanitizer / hand soap for employees, volunteers, and visitors?

- Do you have a plan to screen individuals for symptoms before entering facility, or to provide self-screening guidance?
- Do you have a plan to limit the number of people in your restrooms and monitor their safety? (Please Describe)
- Do you have a response plan in case an employee, volunteer, or visitor tests positive? (Please Describe)

Facility Safety

- Do you have a process to log all employees and volunteers at facility? (Please Describe)
- Have you considered ways to remove or modify high-touch, shared, or community items?
- Have you posted signs to remind employees, volunteers, and visitors of best practices? Where will they be posted?
- Is the HVAC system working properly? Have air ducts been cleaned recently? (Please Describe)

Visitor Expectations

- Do you have plan to make sure visitors are informed and prepared to visit site? (Please Describe)

Employee Support

- Have you trained employees and volunteers returning to work on COVID-19 health and safety guidelines?

Other Groups

- For church school and VBS: There must be a limit of 10 individuals with 2 teachers maximum (for Safe Sanctuaries protocol) per classroom or group. Children and teachers must wear masks and observe the 6 feet of distance protocol. Groups or classes should not gather together for play or fellowship.
- For outside groups using the church, they must observe all the guidelines stated in this document, have their own insurance coverage, and provide for complete sanitation of the facilities they have used after their events. It is suggested that the task force or church provide an independent checklist of all of guidelines you expect of them.

A FINAL WORD OF CAUTION FROM OUR HUB INSURANCE CARRIER

Liability exposures that may not be covered are those resulting from a church or pastor's negligence leading to the exposure and infection of church employees, volunteers, members or guests or there could be a product liability claim asserting that the church air filtration system failed, causing exposure or illness. There are potential discrimination issues when a church returns some but not all employees back to work and so it is important to seek legal advice regarding the rights and obligations of employees who do not want to return to the workplace. Dealing with older employees and older congregants with underlying health conditions is another liability exposure as well as testing employee and volunteers before returning to work at the church. Again, whether such claims are covered under the terms of the policy is unlikely but requires legal review and determination by the insurance company. It is our opinion that the Commercial General Liability policy was not intended to cover COVID-19 claims.

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR PHASED RE-OPENING

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Guidelines

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>

State and County Resources

California State Roadmap: <https://covid19.ca.gov/roadmap/>

California Guidance for Places of Worship: <https://covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>

Hawaii State Roadmap: https://governor.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Gov_Reopening-Presentation-Slide-Deck_18-May-2020.pdf

Guam Roadmap: <https://www.investguam.com/roadtorecovery/>

Saipan COVID information: <https://www.mymarianas.com/coronavirus-covid-19-resources/>

Los Angeles County: <https://covid19.lacounty.gov/recovery/>

Los Angeles County Guidance for Places of Worship: <https://corona-virus.la/sites/default/files/inline-files/20200521%20LA%20Resuming%20Operations%20Toolkit%20-%20Houses%20of%20Worship%20-%20vShare.pdf>

Orange County:

[https://www.ocgov.com/gov/hr/eb/covid info and resources/covid 19 health plan resources](https://www.ocgov.com/gov/hr/eb/covid%20info%20and%20resources/covid%2019%20health%20plan%20resources)

Riverside County: <https://riversideca.gov/sites/default/files/press/img/COVID-19%20Planning%20Toolkit%20for%20Riverside%20Businesses.pdf>

Santa Barbara County: <https://recoveryabc.org/>

San Bernardino County: <http://wp.sbcounty.gov/cao/countywire/?p=7067>

San Diego County: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/coronavirus.html>

Ventura County: <https://www.vcemergency.com/vc-reopens>

UMC Connectional Resources

Mountain Sky Reopening Plan:

[https://www.mtnskyumc.org/files/content/disaster+prep/coronavirus/msc+\(re\)launch+church+study+guidebook.pdf](https://www.mtnskyumc.org/files/content/disaster+prep/coronavirus/msc+(re)launch+church+study+guidebook.pdf)

Pacific Northwest Plan: <https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>

Virginia Annual Conference Plan: <https://vaumc.org/return/>

Western PA AC Plan:

<https://www.wpaumc.org/files/communications/guidelines+for+reopening+churches.pdf>

North Georgia AC COVID Hub: <https://www.ngumc.org/covid-19-response-resources>

Board of Discipleship Resource: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/when-we-return>

Resource about singing (or not) in worship

Moravian Church produced: <https://youtu.be/LNzGkflAkZQ>

Insurance Resources

Guide One: <https://www.guideone.com/blog/considerations-reopening-your-religious-organization>

Church Mutual Insurance Checklist: <https://quote.churchmutual.com/coronavirus/thank-you/facility-management-checklist>

Camps and Children/Youth Program Resources

American Camp Association Comprehensive Resource (in conjunction with the CDC): <https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/coronavirus/camp-business/camp-operations-guide-summer-2020>

CDC information for Childcare, Schools, and Youth Programs: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

CDC Guidance for Homeless Service Providers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>