

Guidance for Planning to Gather in-Person

The following content is designed to help Ohio District congregations make plans to again gather in-person. The few churches that are already gathering in-person can review this document for possible improvements.

This guidance is being provided because civil and medical authorities have made it clear that there is still a risk for contracting or spreading COVID-19. This information was gathered from a wide range of sources, from public health departments to denominational leaders, from Ohio District churches to district staff. These are recommendations; final decisions remain with congregations. Please use caution and exercise sound judgment.



President Wilson

Research Limitations and Restrictions

- Check with state authorities for laws, mandates and recommendations that impact gathering-in-person activities and comply with them
- Do the same with regional and local authorities, including health boards
- Check with your church’s insurance company and legal counsel before restarting worship in-person

Key Commitments for Safety

- Commit to creating, implementing and monitoring written procedures for thorough sanitation and safety
- Commit to social distancing on all church property
- Commit to asking members with any possible symptoms of a virus (fever, etc.) to not attend in-person gatherings at church until it is safe to do so
- Commit to giving permission to members to not attend in-person if they are concerned about their personal wellbeing, including reassurances the church will continue to provide care at a distance

Key Decisions for Safety

- Determine whether to ask members who are at greater risk for COVID-19 to consider not attending initial in-person gathering, e.g., your older members or others who may be at a higher risk if contracting the virus
- Determine how to keep a safe distance between vehicles parking in the parking lot
- Encourage those gathering to wear face coverings and possibly gloves
- Determine whether doors will be propped open, opened by people wearing gloves, etc.
- Determine how to collect the offering in the safest manner possible
- Determine what to remove from the sanctuary, such as hymnals, attendance cards, pens or pencils, etc.
- Determine how to lead the worship without using hymnals, such as disposable printed materials or projections
- Encourage solos, duets, or trios (with six feet distancing) instead of choirs
- Strongly consider placing “Please Do Not Use” signs on water fountains, coffee makers, etc.

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Thoughts for Safely Celebrating the Lord’s Supper

- As much as possible, limit contact with Communion elements and vessels. Those touching elements and vessels should wash hands before and after preparing Holy Communion. Consideration should be given to wearing latex gloves
- Regardless of how the elements are distributed, the pastor should wash his hands. Consider using hand sanitizer right before touching the vessels or elements or wearing latex gloves and face covering
- Practice social distancing in distributing the Lord’s Supper. Individuals or family groups should be at least six feet apart waiting to commune, communing, and returning to their seats
- Thought should be given to how the pastor to stay six feet from worshippers receiving the Lord’s Supper. For example, the pastor could place the host and an individual cup on the altar rail, the motion for those communing to approach the rail
- Consider not offering the common cup during the pandemic
- Avoid having members kneel or lean on the communion rail

Communication Keys

- Set a date at least three weeks in the future for the initial in-person gathering for worship
- In the weeks before reopening gathering in-person, clearly communicate to members what to expect when they arrive at church
- Determine how to communicate with local authorities and the local community the date your church will again gather in-person and the steps being taken to do so safely
- Communicate your start date for gathering-in-person to sister churches in the circuit