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General Guidance and Resources on Reopening Your Church

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The Coronavirus has created some new and unique challenges for our church worship services and other gatherings. We're all looking forward to the day when we can enjoy the person-to-person fellowship that marks our church communities and worship together in our church buildings, but I trust that your church continues its work of loving and caring well for your congregation, local community and those impacted by the virus. In thinking about reopening your church, the most important consideration is the health and safety of your members, your staff, and your visitors. Developing a plan for reopening should involve much prayer, thought, discussion, and consideration. The primary question is not "*When can we open?*" but "*When should we open?*"

How that question is answered will depend on the unique set of circumstances and situations in each church that will impact your decisions regarding meeting in person: the demographic of your church membership, the size of your congregation, the safety and sanitization of your church facility, the willingness of the gathered people to adhere to safety guidelines, etc. We highly recommend that each church establish a task force of medical professionals and leaders to best address this question, develop a coordinated plan for reopening, and make recommendations to your Session.

Several priorities should guide the decision-making as you move forward:

1. Be committed to a reopening plan that protects the health and safety of your church community as a whole. Considerations for the community should supersede considerations for individual persons or groups.
2. Be committed to honoring the directives of the governmental authorities in both the State of California and your local county and/or city. We believe their authority is not in conflict with God's authority (see Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1-2) and trust that they are receiving dependable and informed advice from expert medical professionals.
3. Understand the importance of your church as a participating and trusted member of your neighborhood and city. Your actions as a church are a witness to others (both positively and negatively), and that "going the extra mile" to protect your neighbors is a way that you can "love them as Christ has loved us." In doing so, you will enhance your ability to communicate the Gospel to them (Mark 12:30-31).
4. Seek to protect and honor the most vulnerable among you – those over age 65 and those with underlying medical conditions - who are worthy of our honor (1 Cor. 12:22-23a).

5. Respect the personal decision of any member or attender of your church; to encourage the congregation to refrain from judging or condemning those who might be more or less enthusiastic than them, or more or less hesitant than them to return to in-person gatherings at the church (Matthew 7:1).

While a return to physical church gatherings will offer varying levels of comfort and familiarity to your members, it is important to note that there will also be a number of changes to the experience that most participants were used to. A new and ever evolving “normal” will be established as you move through the various phases of the crisis and reopening. The thoughtful and continued leadership of your pastor(s) and Session, continued communication, and prayerful consideration by everyone will be important to making your reopening safe, successful and life-giving.

Helpful Resources for Reopening Your Church

48 Questions to Ask (Ken Braddy)

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/28/48-questions-pdf/>

Church Facility Checklist

<http://docs.thechurchnetwork.com/COVID/csg-231-post-coronavirus-facility-checklist.original.pdf>

Covid-Safe Guidelines for Reopening

<http://www.epcpops.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Covid-Safe-Church-Guidelines-1-1.pdf>

Christianity Today – Here’s How to Meet Safely

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-web-only/when-churches-reopen-phase-coronavirus-covid-19-guidelines.html>

CDC Guidelines for Mass Gatherings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>

The Gospel Coalition – Don’t Let Coronavirus Divide Your Church

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-dont-let-coronavirus-divide/>