

Reimagining LIFE TOGETHER

*Requirements and recommendations for
local churches and ministry settings to reopen
buildings and return to ministry activities
during the COVID-19 crisis.*
Released on May 20, 2020



THE
GREATER
NORTHWEST
AREA
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Our Theological Task

Realities of intense human suffering, threats to the survival of life, and challenges to human dignity confront us afresh with fundamental theological issues: the nature and purposes of God, the relations of human beings to one another, the nature of human freedom and responsibility, and the care and proper use of all creation.

"Our Theological Task," The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016, ¶ 105.4

To be Christian is to see the world and understand our place in it. Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God and his teachings about prayer, giving, and living all focus on our place in a world that is turned on its head. The simple phrase, "But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you." (Luke 6:27 CEB) is a reimagined way to be in the world as the beloved of God.

As we contemplate coming out of this time of "stay at home" and isolation we are entering a world none of us could have imagined. We must take this opportunity to rethink what it means to be the followers of Christ, to be those on the Way. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community" (from *Life Together*).

As we reenter life together, we must allow for our dream or memory of community to fade to make room for love to emerge in new and different ways. The task we have is to reimagine church and all we are and do so that we can be what God dreams us to be. After all, church isn't a building; it isn't doors or a steeple. Church is the people in ministry and service. If we can't do this ministry in the ways we have in the past, we will find new ways to do it. We will find a way. Our imaginations can show us what is possible.

God doesn't need our worship; God wants our worshipful lives. God doesn't need our memories of community; God wants us to reimagine how we love and thereby create community.

Our challenge is to love in new and innovative ways as we reimagine what church is, what community is, in this new reality.

Doing No Harm as We Return

We are living through an unsettling time. The COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed many of the things we take for granted. It has caused much pain, hardship, and loss, exposing deep inequities woven into our societal fabric.

Gathering as a community in person to worship God, growing deeper in discipleship, and serving our communities in many of the ways we were accustomed may seem minor, but it is profoundly important. We have all sacrificed something for our common wellbeing, and we have worked hard to reimagine both worship and service, ensuring that the critical work of the church continues.

People are eager to return to our buildings and to the patterns of worship, discipleship, and service so familiar to us. This is natural but we need to walk carefully through the weeks and months ahead. Without a cure for COVID-19, and absent the widespread testing and contact tracing public health officials have repeatedly advised, we all share a new responsibility to do no harm. We should also think twice before letting go of all that we are learning in these days spent in the wilderness. What new practices and adaptations have we stretched to make? What might God want us to carry forward into this new phase in our lives together?

This document is meant to provoke questions and provide guidance for local churches and other ministries as we reimagine returning to our facilities and ministry practices. This process will not be akin to flipping on a light switch — it will happen in phases. We won't always move as soon as we are permitted, all activities won't resume at once, and no one should expect things to be exactly how they were.

Regardless of where we live, the practices of our local churches will be impacted for at least the next year. Our actions, and those of communities that surround us, can make a big difference in how harmful that impact will be. Creativity and resilience will continue to be blessed resources as we strive to do no harm, do good, and to stay in love with God.

May God give us all the spirit of discernment, the wisdom to act with appropriate caution, and the patience to await the good God would have us do.

Moving through the requirements for returning

States across the United States have adopted phased guidelines for reopening their economies and lifting restrictions designed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Each of the four states within the Greater Northwest Area are already taking some steps toward easing restrictions, though not at the same pace. The coronavirus has not impacted all communities evenly, and some of this unevenness is outside of science-based guidelines as governors navigate economic, political, and ideological pressures.

Reopening and resuming in-person worship for local churches and ministries of the Greater Northwest Area will occur in a four-phase process. Three conditions must be met before advancing from one phase to the next of reopening:

1. Bishop Stanovsky ends or relaxes suspension of in-person worship and building closures, allowing movement to the next phase.
2. State and local public health guidance permits intended activities in the next phase.
3. A local church or organization reopening plan has been approved and implemented by the responsible District Superintendent or Director of Connectional Ministries working under the authority of the Bishop.

Requirement One

Currently, Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky has extended her “suspension of in-person worship in United Methodist Churches and other ministries and the closure of church facilities to all but essential services throughout the Alaska, Oregon-Idaho, and Pacific Northwest Conferences through June 15, 2020.” Based upon the best information available, this suspension may be extended further, as necessary to do no harm.

While this suspension is in effect, local churches and other ministry settings should prepare for the next phase of reopening.

Requirement Two

The governor of each state is responsible for the decision to reopen their state, easing mitigation efforts and physical distancing requirements as they go. With the governor’s consent, some counties or regions may do so more quickly than others, though only with the governor’s consent.

United Methodist local churches and other ministries must always meet state sanitation and physical distancing requirements of their community, at a minimum. If there is dispute between local requirements and those required by state officials, the church should err on the side of the more restrictive of the two. If there is significant disagreement between public health officials and political leaders, again, err on the more restrictive side.

Requirement Three

No United Methodist local church or ministry across the Greater Northwest Area may reopen without approval of its plan by their assigned District Superintendent or Director of Connectional Ministries working under the authority of the Bishop. Each church and ministry setting needs to prepare a plan for a phased reopening that details how you will address the required ministry and safety-related items identified in this document while also wrestling with other faith-related questions raised by this pandemic. Begin now to plan for reopening and to receive feedback and pre-approval for your plan from your District Superintendent or Director of Connectional Ministries and procure the materials needed for safe reopening of facilities and return to in-person gatherings.

The Phases of Safe Reopening

The Greater Northwest Area will be prudent and measured in reopening our churches and ministry sites and returning to in-person worship and gatherings. Four Phases will mark a safe reopening of local church and other ministry facilities throughout the Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, and Washington states. What happens in one location impacts the health of surrounding areas, just as one person's personal distancing and hygiene practices impacts the people around them. **While some states may allow faith communities to gather sooner and in larger groups than is permitted for other organizations, following our commitment to do no harm, United Methodist ministries will not open using this exemption.**

If infection rates increase in your area, or if you have a high proportion of people in high-risk categories, churches and ministries may need to remain in or move back to a previous phase.

While the Greater Northwest Area will continue to closely monitor the statements of public health officials, we may not move into stages as quickly as permitted. We understand that this may create some tension in local communities eager to return to their buildings. Please know that we are not making these decisions lightly and we review our posture regularly, guided by John Wesley's Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm. Do Good. Stay in Love With God.

Phase 1

Phase 1 began on March 13, 2020 when Bishop Stanovsky suspended in-person worship and other gatherings for local churches and ministry settings. This suspension is in effect through June 15, 2020 and may be extended. A group of 5 or less is permitted to gather in the building to record or produce online worship resources, while practicing physical distancing, wearing face masks, and observing other hygiene practices. Each person may remove their face mask while they are speaking during active recording. Consistent with emerging research (<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/05/08/church-music-covid19>), the production of in-person vocal music is prohibited in facilities. High-touch surfaces must be sanitized after each use. Facilities are closed except for "essential services". Ministries are strongly encouraged to continue or expand creative ways of meeting, serving, and worshipping together, striving to include vulnerable persons making healthy choices to participate in virtual ways.

Phase 2

In Phase 2 in-person worship suspension continues. It allows a group of 10 or fewer to gather in the building to record or produce online worship resources, while practicing physical distancing, wearing face masks, and observing other hygiene practices. Each person may remove their face mask while they are speaking during active recording. The production of in-person vocal music remains prohibited in facilities. High-touch surfaces must be sanitized after each use. Access to Church buildings is limited to designated staff, volunteers, meetings, and services. Ministries are strongly encouraged to continue to meet, serve, and worship together, remotely, striving to include vulnerable persons making healthy choices to participate in virtual ways.

Phase 3

Phase 3 allows for in-person worship, weddings, and funerals for up to 50 people while wearing face masks and utilizing proper sanitizing and physical distancing. No communion, live singing or food service is allowed, and high-risk populations must continue to worship from home. Outside of worship, access to Church buildings is limited to designated staff, volunteers, meetings, and services. Fellowship and education activities for adults, children and youth must remain virtual and in-person vacation bible school and mission trips remain cancelled.

Phase 4

Phase 4 returns to more “regular” worship and other gatherings with no size limit. High risk populations are invited to join at their discretion, but churches are strongly encouraged to continue reimagined ways of sharing space, providing meaningful opportunities to participate in the life of the church virtually. With increased hygiene practices communion may be shared and limited “coffee hour” or “fellowship time” may resume. **Live singing is still not permitted.** Access to church buildings is open, while maintaining appropriate safety practices.

Beyond Phase 4

This is a “new normal” that is yet to be determined. This will include monitoring health indicators and guidance from government and health professionals. It will be important to establish new routines that are more protective of public health, and to take forward with us new practices that will make us more resilient if a similar challenge were to (re)emerge. Additional guidance will be provided in the future.

A Safe Reopening at a Glance

PHASE	1	2	3	4
HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS	Stay Home, Save Lives	Stay Home, Save Lives	Stay Home, Save Lives	Discretionary
PHYSICAL DISTANCING	Strict	Strict	Moderate	Limited
MAXIMUM GROUP SIZE	5	10	50	No size limit
LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Develop plan re-imagining ministry together Create communication strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates
SAFETY ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face masks & physical distancing required Hand washing or sanitizer used consistently Sanitize after each use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face masks & physical distancing required Hand washing or sanitizer used consistently Sanitize after each use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face masks & physical distancing required Alternatives to typical worship practices Provide hygiene supplies Sanitize after each use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternatives to typical worship practices Provide hygiene supplies Sanitize regularly
STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and volunteers work from home Limited access for essential functions allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and designated volunteers may work in building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and designated volunteers may work in building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and designated volunteers resume work in building
WORSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual only Group of 5 or less may gather in building for worship recording, no singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual only Group of 10 less may gather in building for worship recording, no singing Drive-in type gatherings permitted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual plus in-person worship up to 50 people, weddings and funerals No communion, live singing, or food service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual plus in-person worship, weddings and funerals No live singing Limited coffee hour service
MINISTRY ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS	Virtual only	Virtual plus limited in-person designated meetings & services	Virtual plus limited in-person designated meetings & services	Virtual and in-person
BUILDING USE	Closed	Limited to staff, volunteers & designated services	Limited to staff, volunteers & designated services	Open
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND OUTREACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Limited essential crisis services offered outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Limited essential crisis services offered outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Limited services in building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Services in building
ESSENTIAL SERVICES	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines
OTHER MINISTRY SETTINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closed Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry

Reimagining Your Ministry Plan

Establish a Team

Develop a team of three to ten people, including the pastor. Include those who can think critically and realistically about your church's capacity, culture, and context. Encourage and empower them to be creative as your church thinks about how it will continue to engage in its mission and ministry in the months to come. For ministry settings other than local churches, the director, board members, and constituents or participants are people to consider.

As you begin, realize that people and communities will have varied reactions to the possibility of gathering in-person as a church or in other group settings. People will have various emotional reactions and willingness to abide by restrictions on personal space and use of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves. As leaders we must help people find a way that endeavors to "do no harm." That is the work of your team. Who are the right leaders to lead your ministry along this journey?

Draft Ministry Plan Together

The role of the team is to:

1. **Pray.** Seek God's guidance for how you will best follow John Wesley's Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm. Do Good. Stay in Love with God.
2. **Plan.** Engage in mission and ministry planning about your church or organization. Be realistic, honest, and creative.
3. **Write.** Begin drafting your plan as you reimagine ministry together. Be in conversation with your District Superintendent or Director of Connectional Ministries as you draft this written plan. Evaluate and update your plan as necessary.
4. **Share.** Identify appropriate ways to share the necessary components of the ministry plan with your congregation or constituents.

What Should the Plan Include?

The following pages are designed to assist local churches and ministry settings prepare your written plan for reimagining life together as a community of faith following the COVID-19 crisis. The information is intended to provoke questions and provide guidance as you contemplate returning to your facilities and ministry practices. Each of the sections that follow below corresponds to the categories of the "Safe Reopening at a Glance" chart. As you pray, plan, write, and share make use of the "Additional Resources" links in each of the following sections.

Your ministry reopening plan must address all "Key Actions" in each of the categories outlined in the "A Safe Reopening at a Glance" chart. The "Guiding Questions" are included to help frame your thinking. Your plan should demonstrate that you have reflected on the guidelines and what they mean for your ministry context.

Explanation of Terms

Overview

This section defines key terms important to understand for the development of your plan for reimagining ministry together. Your team should be reviewing these terms and incorporate them into your plan.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS	Stay Home, Save Lives	Stay Home, Save Lives	Stay Home, Save Lives	Discretionary
PHYSICAL DISTANCING	Strict	Strict	Moderate	Limited
MAXIMUM GROUP SIZE	5	10	50	No size limit

High-Risk Populations

The CDC states, everyone is at risk of getting COVID-19. **Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions** might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>)

Based on what we know now, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled. These include those with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, compromised immune systems, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, and liver disease.

Physical Distancing

Limiting face-to-face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

Physical distancing, also called “social distancing,” means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice physical distancing:

- Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people
- Do not gather in groups
- Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings

Maximum Group Size

This is the maximum number of people – including children and those leading the gathering – who may gather at one location at any given time. In addition to worship this is relevant to committee meetings, educational activities, or other events.

The size of space you are using will also impact your group size. A small country church or small education

room may not even hold 10 people with 6 feet of distancing. You will need to assess the maximum number of people each room can safely accommodate with 6 feet of distancing.

An important consideration is knowing what you will do if the maximum group size is reached. How will you limit the number of people in a space if you reach the maximum? How will you turn someone away while communicating welcome and hospitality?

Recommendations and Requirements

We understand that some states and localities are “recommending” some things and “requiring” less restrictive measures. Churches are advised to follow recommended guidelines even if it is not required by state and local authorities. This is one way that we “do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God”.

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Explanation of Terms. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Leadership Responsibilities

Overview

Steady leadership throughout this pandemic is crucial. This work cannot be accomplished solely through the leadership of your pastor or director. The ministry reopening team will identify solutions to challenges that emerge, but also imaginatively respond to the opportunities that often accompany those challenges. Churches are not expected to reopen on a set schedule. No church should reopen before it can do so in compliance with the guidelines below.

The ministry reopening team's task is to assess your church's or ministry's readiness to live within the guidelines of each phase in your respective area of responsibility. Key to this is assessing the vulnerability of your congregation or constituents and your broader community.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess church or ministry capacity Review & update plan reimagining ministry together Communicate progress or updates

Key Actions

- Prayerfully consider your leadership and ministry through the lens of John Wesley's Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm, Do Good, Stay in Love With God.
- Assess your church or ministry capacity and your own leadership capacity
- Ensure the development, review, and updating of your plan reimagining ministry together
- Continually monitor the implementation of your plan reimagining ministry together
- Develop and implement strategy to effectively communicate your plan reimagining ministry together, including progress and necessary updates

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Leadership Responsibilities. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. Is your church prepared to follow this slow, phased re-entry process?
2. What and how will you communicate with your church in advance of reopening?
3. What is the composition of your staff/leadership/members/constituents/and community? Who are at high-risk?

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4. What are new ways of being church that you have learned during the suspension of in-person worship that you will carry forward?
 5. Are there previous practices that you discontinued during closure that can be set aside to make room for new practices?
 6. What in your church's history can empower and inform the reopening process?

Safety Actions

Overview

To “do no harm” we must take seriously safety actions – including face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning – in order to protect the health of the entire congregation and broader community.

Your task is to make sure that your facilities and the people in your congregation are safe to reopen and gather. Don’t overlook the importance of new practices to both include those who need to participate in the life of the church virtually, and to help acclimate those worshipping in-person in unfamiliar ways.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
SAFETY ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Face masks & physical distancing required ▪ Hand washing or sanitizer used consistently ▪ Sanitize after each use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Face masks & physical distancing required ▪ Hand washing or sanitizer used consistently ▪ Sanitize after each use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Face masks & physical distancing required ▪ Alternatives to typical worship practices ▪ Provide hygiene supplies ▪ Sanitize after each use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alternatives to typical worship practices ▪ Provide hygiene supplies ▪ Sanitize regularly

Key Actions

Promote healthy hygiene practices

- Require use of a cloth face covering/mask at all gatherings and when in the building by everyone (including preachers & worship leaders) except children aged less than 2 years old, until Phase 4
- Have a supply of clean masks to hand out to those who show up without one
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol, tissues, and no-touch trash can
- Post signs on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 and promote everyday protective measures

Teach, model, and ensure proper physical distancing

- Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people

Limit maximum group size

- The maximum number of people – including children and those leading the gathering – who may gather at one location at any given time
- Phase 1 = 5. Phase 2 = 10 people. Phase 3 = 50 people. Phase 4 = no size limit.

Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects between use
- Remove bibles, hymnals, other materials from the seats or pews.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected

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- Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep them away from children
 - Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc.
 - Take steps to ensure that all water systems and fixtures (sinks, drinking fountains, etc.) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of Legionnaires' disease and other diseases associated with water

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Safety Actions. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. Reimagine gathering together in your space. How will you ensure that masks are worn by everyone in your space and that hand sanitizer, soap, tissues, and no-touch trash cans support healthy hygiene behaviors?
2. How will you teach, model, and ensure physical distancing at all times? What signage will you need and where will you put it?
3. How will you disinfect your facility now, while it is still closed, and how will you sanitize all high touch surfaces after each use when you are back in your space? See CDC guidelines.
4. How will you ensure the maximum group size is not exceeded?
5. Examining current worship practices, what alternatives do you need to put in place to keep physical distancing and limit contact with surfaces (e.g. passing the peace, handshakes, passing offering plate, communion, greeters, hymnals)?
6. What will you do if a person refuses to adhere to the physical distancing and other safety requirements?

Staff and Volunteers

Overview

Staff and volunteers are critical to the life of any congregation or organization. Proactive steps should be taken so staff and volunteers are protecting themselves while in the building and the broader community. Individuals must be made aware of the safety guidelines at each phase of reopening to protect the health of everyone.

This section includes both individual staff and volunteers, as well as volunteer groups, teams, or committees.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff and volunteers work from homeLimited access for essential functions allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff and designated volunteers may work in building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff and designated volunteers may work in building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff and designated volunteers resume work in building

Key Actions

- All staff and volunteers must work from home, and offices should continue to suspend in-person work until Phase 2. Limited access for essential functions, such as collecting the mail or processing checks, is allowed with appropriate safety actions.
- Train all staff in safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
- Require staff or volunteers who are sick to stay at home.
- Staff, volunteers, and committees should meet only virtually or by phone until Phase 2.
- Keep office functions as limited as possible. Those in the office should be wearing face masks unless working in isolation.
- If you have more than one person in the office, make sure that surfaces, including the phone and computer, are regularly sanitized.
- Maintain safety actions, including face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning (see Safety Actions section)

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Staff and Volunteers. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. Is your staff currently working from home and how has your church accommodated them?
2. Have you identified high-risk employees and volunteers and considered how to both protect them and incorporate them during your reopening?

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3. Are surfaces being sanitized daily following use?
 4. Reimagine your workplace arrangements for existing staff and volunteers to allow for adequate physical distancing during the workday?
 5. Do you have a policy in place to require staff, volunteers, and members to stay home if sick?

Worship

Overview

Worship is one significant component of our life in ministry together. It is how we celebrate God and one another. This pandemic has helped many of us to understand that we need to reimagine our definition of what it means to ‘worship’ and even what it means to be ‘together.’

Protecting our congregational health is crucial when we worship together in-person. Churches should expect to continue offering virtual worship, or provide other opportunities to ensure people can connect at a distance, through each of these phases and beyond.

The task when thinking about worship is to understand the deeper functions of worship and examine how it can be adapted to meet the requirements of each phase of reopening.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
WORSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Virtual onlyGroup of 5 or less may gather in building for worship recording, no singing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Virtual onlyGroup of 10 less may gather in building for worship recording, no singingDrive-in type gatherings permitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Virtual plus in-person worship up to 50 people, weddings and funeralsNo communion, live singing, or food service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Virtual plus in-person worship, weddings and funeralsNo live singingLimited coffee hour

Key Actions

- Refrain from in-person worship until Phase 3
- Provide opportunities for virtual worship through Phase 4 and beyond
- Remove bibles, hymnals, and other shared worship resources until Phase 4.
- Modify common “high touch” practices of passing the peace, handshakes, passing offering plate, and other activities to allow “touch free” alternatives
- No in-person communion until Phase 4
- No live singing (congregation, choir, or solos) or brass and wind instruments until beyond Phase 4
- No coffee hour or other food service until Phase 4
- Childcare, Sunday School, and children’s church are not offered until Phase 4
- Maintain safety actions, including face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning (see Safety Actions section)

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Worship. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. How will you welcome children into the worship space when childcare and Sunday School is not available until Phase 4? How will you encourage them to keep physical distance?
2. Picture how your church is going to manage social distancing in your worship space. What areas need to be opened or rearranged? What areas should be closed? Will you mark off or move pews or chairs to separate family groups? How will you manage foot traffic into and out of the church or rooms?
3. How will you prepare your congregation for a worship experience that will feel very different (masks, spacing, no singing, different greetings, no communion, no receiving line, no fellowshiping afterwards) to both inform them and solicit their participation in doing no harm?
4. Are there purchases/improvements you need to make to your space to accommodate worship at a time when we're trying to limit touching physical objects (e.g. offering boxes, improved sound system)?
5. Reimagine what "hybrid" worship looks like as, even as you reopen, you may need to continue your on-line, recorded, etc. worship and gathering efforts?

Ministry Activities and Events

Overview

Our ministry is more than just worship. It is also about engaging with one another in small and large group activities and events. In your context this setting might include education, discipleship, children and youth ministry, vacation bible school, and more.

Your task is to develop plans for how groups might continue meeting in virtual spaces and prepare for the time when they can meet again in-person. As you reimagine this work, consider how the adoption of virtual and hybrid (in-person and virtual) practices can help your congregation to be inclusive of people after the pandemic subsides.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
MINISTRY ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS	Virtual only	Virtual plus limited in-person designated meetings & services	Virtual plus limited in-person designated meetings & services	Virtual and in-person

Key Actions

- Implement ways ministry activities and events can continue virtually until at least Phase 2 and beyond
- Childcare, Sunday School, and children's church are not offered until Phase 4
- Consider new activities to meet individuals' needs for community, education, and faith sharing. This might require setting aside regular activities for a season or ending some activities.
- Communicate with group members or constituents about new, changed, or cancelled ministry activities or events
- When in-person meetings are allowed (limited beginning in Phase 2), maintain safety actions, including face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning (see Safety Actions section)

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Ministry Activities and Events. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. Think of the upcoming, regular ministries and events hosted by your church and ask how each one will need adapting to meet the distancing and sanitizing requirements?
2. What ministry activities (perhaps a new one) will you offer to meet the spiritual and pastoral care needs of the congregation going forward?
3. How will your congregation handle the fact that in-person vacation bible school, other summer children and youth activities, and mission trips must be cancelled or moved to a virtual method?
4. How will you ensure proper hygiene, physical distancing, and group size are adhered to when groups meet in-person outside of your worship time?
5. How will you communicate with and work with each ministry or group to ensure that contact tracing can occur if someone has been exposed?

Building Use

Overview

All people – staff, volunteers, congregants, community members and renters – who utilize your building need to understand how the building can be used during this COVID-19 time and their part in maintaining the health and safety of anyone who uses the building.

Your task is to develop plans for the use and care of your space, as well as communicate these to your congregation and constituents of the space.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
BUILDING USE	Closed	Limited to staff, volunteers & designated services	Limited to staff, volunteers & designated services	Open

Key Actions

- Maintain safety actions, including face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning (see Safety Actions section)
- Communicate, through email, posted signs, etc., new requirements, protocols, or actions to congregation, partner groups, and renters
- Post on entrances to the building notification of the current Reimagining Phase and a summary of restrictions. Use care to note that building is monitored regularly even during early phases to make it a less attractive target for thieves and vandals.
- Revise building use agreements/contracts/leases to reflect new requirements of safety actions, including face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning, and other new realities of COVID-19
- Monitor closed property for unforeseen needs (leaks, damage, etc.) and vandalism

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Building Use. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. How many groups use your facility? What building use agreements or contracts do you have in place for them? If you haven't had an agreement, this is a time to have one to make sure each group is keeping those in your building safe.
2. As a response to this season of physical separation, how do you see your building being used in new ways to meet the needs of the community?
3. Where are the problem areas in your building (with the most use, most high-touch surfaces, the most challenging places to clean)?

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4. How are you going to rearrange your spaces? What signage on the walls or directional arrows on the floor do you need and how will your congregation respond?
 5. Can a separate section be established for the dedicated seating of higher-risk individuals if needed/required?

Community Connections and Outreach

Overview

An important component in the life of the church is our outreach with those outside our church. Our spaces are often community gathering places for scouting troops and support groups such as Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous. Our buildings sometimes house food pantries and daycares that serve the community. In addition, we often go out into the community or travel great distances for mission trips. Sometimes we welcome others into our spaces for mission.

Your task here is to review your community connections and outreach ministries. How will you “do no harm” and abide by the phase guidelines when there are seemingly competing values of caring for others? What re-imagined adaptations for worship and church meetings can you extend to these other groups whose efforts are part of your larger mission?

PHASE	1	2	3	4
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND OUTREACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual ▪ Limited essential crisis services offered outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual ▪ Limited essential crisis services offered outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual ▪ Limited services in building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual ▪ Services in building

Key Actions

- Maintain community connections and outreach, with increased safety actions
- Clearly communicate your needs, limitations, guidelines, and restrictions with your community partners
- Follow all safety recommendations and guidelines from CDC, state, local, church and partner organizations
- The hosting of scouting troops, support and other community groups is suspended until Phase 3
- Daycares and church schools, health clinics and shelters are limited to essential crisis services until Phase 3 (see Essential Services section)
- Outreach activities, such as food pantries, are limited to no-touch services provided outdoors until Phase 3
- Mission trips (going FROM or TO your congregation) requiring overnight travel are suspended until Phase 4, at minimum
- Identify local mission opportunities that do not require travel

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related Community Connections and Outreach. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. Reimagine your current community connections and outreach with proper safety requirements.
2. Are there creative ways you can partner with community members to address local needs while still meeting safety requirements and other guidelines?
3. How might you assist support groups that normally meet in your building to do so virtually?
4. How will your congregation and partners in ministry “do no harm” and abide by the phase guidelines if there are seemingly competing values of caring for others?
5. How will you welcome designated groups back into your building and communicate new safety actions required by all people entering the building?

Essential Services

Overview

Some churches or other ministry settings are serving as centers for “essential services” as identified by state or local authorities. These might include a daycare for children of essential workers, shelters, food distribution locations, or other essential services

Each of these essential services utilizing a United Methodist facility must be made aware of your plan and work with church leaders to make sure health and safety protocols can be met.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
ESSENTIAL SERVICES	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines

Key Actions

- Only “essential services” identified by state or local authorities are permitted
- Follow guidelines from local and state authorities, in addition to those of any partner organization
- Ensure agreements and contracts are up-to-date and reflect necessary safety actions of face masks, hygiene, physical distancing, and cleaning

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related Essential Services. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. Have you researched and do you understand the state and local guidelines for the specific “essential service” so you are prepared to adhere to them?
2. How will you communicate to your congregation or constituents any necessary information about this “essential service”?
3. How will you prepare for the necessary transition of this “essential service” following this crisis time?
4. Your church may not have provided an “essential service” during this time. As you think about your community’s response to COVID-19, were there essential services that were needed that your church could have provided?

Other Ministry Settings

Overview

Our United Methodist ministry often extends beyond local churches to partner and affiliated organizations. Camp and Retreat Ministries and campus ministries are two examples. These groups are a vital part of our ministry and who we are as Christians in the world.

Like local churches these ministry settings must also adhere to the phased reopening plans related to ministry and safety standards. Additionally, it is understood that these ministry settings are unique, and guidelines need to be adapted to their specific contexts.

PHASE	1	2	3	4
OTHER MINISTRY SETTINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Closed▪ Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Limited▪ Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Limited▪ Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Open▪ Consistent with guidelines above & contextualized for unique ministry

Key Actions

- Contextualize guidelines for unique ministry settings
- Adhere to state, local, or other partner or accrediting bodies' guidelines
- Work in partnership with Director of Connectional Ministries to share how your ministry will “do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God” during this COVID-19 time

Additional Resources

Visit (<https://greaternw.org/reimagining-life-together/>) for additional resources (coming soon) related to Other Ministry Settings. This page will be updated regularly as new information becomes available.

Guiding Questions

1. How is your ministry creatively solving problems and overcoming challenges at this time?
2. How is your ministry adapting to local, state, church, and accrediting bodies' guidelines during this crisis time?
3. As you think about ministry going forward, what physical changes need to be made to your setting?
4. What partners do you need to be in dialogue with to ensure the safety of those using your setting?

Additional Information

Churches should contact your District Superintendent if you have additional questions

Your District Superintendent will review your plan reimagining ministry together and discuss it with you. If you have questions as you are drafting your plan, please reach out to your District Superintendent.

Other ministry settings should contact the Director of Connectional Ministries if they have additional questions

Directors of Connectional Ministries can help answer questions and interpret guidelines for your ministry setting. Your Director of Connectional Ministries will review your plan reimagining ministry together and discuss it with you. If you have questions as you are drafting your plan, please reach out.

If you have a unique ministry or activity

Ministry settings can be unique and are contextual. If you have something that doesn't clearly fit into one of the identified categories, contact your District Superintendent or Director of Connectional Ministries for additional interpretation and to agree on an appropriate plan.

Additional Resources to consider

- Greater Northwest Area COVID-19 website: www.greaternw.org/coronavirus
- State COVID-19 websites:
 - Alaska: <https://covid19.alaska.gov/>
 - Idaho: <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>
 - Oregon: <https://govstatus.egov.com/or-covid-19/>
 - Washington: <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>