

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Maintain essential operations and services of the church, including but not limited to worship, pastoral care, service, education and mission.
2. At the minimum, follow guidance provided by national, state and local governance.
3. Respect and protect church members, public health and medical professionals, other essential workers and the greater community, especially those that are most vulnerable to COVID19 infection and complications.

BACKGROUND

COVID19 remains in our community. Though widespread infection by this novel coronavirus appears to be relatively limited in our county at this time, in part due to the social distancing efforts and shelter-in-place orders over the last 6-8 weeks, the risk for resurgence remains as these measures are relaxed. State governance has provided a framework (RED/YELLOW/GREEN) to stage a return to normal unrestricted activity, to be determined county by county. The various phases include broad restrictions on gatherings, business and other activities defined here: <https://www.governor.pa.gov/process-to-reopen-pennsylvania/>. The specific time frame for a return to normal is not known, and there may be times when the decision to relax restrictions are reversed.

The goals of these measures are to prevent unmitigated spread of the virus within our community which may overwhelm medical resources and result in deaths and other morbidity that could otherwise be prevented. Currently, there is no cure or vaccine for the virus, and people of all ages are susceptible to infection. The severity of an infection appears to be greater in certain demographics (elderly and individuals with certain chronic medical conditions). Currently it is thought that the incubation phase of this virus (the time from exposure to the time of symptoms) may be up to 14 days and that during some period of this asymptomatic phase, infected individuals may unknowingly expose the contagion to others. Contact tracing is thus an important part of combating the spread of this virus.

The coronavirus mainly spreads through the air, by personal contact and through touching of contaminated surfaces, and is facilitated by several factors: sustained and close contact; indoor or enclosed environment especially with recycled or poor air circulation; activities that produce dispersed exhaled water droplets (singing, exercise).

General behaviors that are recommended to limit the spread of the virus to yourself or others include: Stay home if you are sick; cover coughs/sneezes with elbow (not hands); frequent handwashing; routine cleaning of surfaces that may be frequently touched; social distancing; wear masks when around others in public or at work.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pastors, session, deacons and staff should model the behavior we expect of our congregants and community.
2. Virtual services may be pre-recorded material and/or live webcasting depending on the phase and available staff and equipment.
3. Essential services (pastoral care, Christian nurture, mission, etc) should be adapted to reach people remotely
4. Essential business operations of the church should be supported with strict safety measures
5. Provide electronic giving option
6. Digital media preferred over print media, where able
7. Limit the utilized space in the building and provide routine as well as spot cleaning before and after use.
8. Maintain realistic expectations – don't overdo it and keep messages concise and to the point.

APPROACH

Essential operations of the church should be carried out virtually/online with a measured return to unrestricted activity based upon overall guidance from state, local and national governance. We will provide a layered approach to help guide relaxation of these restrictions that consider the county/state phases, the individuals involved and specific church activities.

- The state process to reopen Pennsylvania is color coded (RED/YELLOW/GREEN); other states and localities have different processes or stages.
- Individuals may be loosely grouped by risk based on *personal assessment*. The church will not assign groupings (**NOTE**: may be better to have just HIGH RISK and OTHER groups to simplify messaging and implementation).

Group A: Increased risk of exposure to or risk of complication from coronavirus infection.

e.g., essential workers with known potential exposures, elderly and those with chronic health conditions.

Group B: Moderate risk of exposure (other essential worker) and no age/chronic health considerations.

e.g., infrastructure or food supply chain worker.

Group C: Low risk of exposure and no age/chronic health considerations.

e.g., lower risk, have sheltered in place with limited contact outside rare outings.

- Church activities are defined in the following chart and include but are not limited to pastoral care, mission and Christian nurture components.

Ultimately, Session or delegated committees will assess and decide on the appropriate course of action for activities on a case by case basis.

PHASED REOPENING SUMMARY

RED PHASE (Shelter in place): Church is closed. Only core church business and maintenance activities are allowed on grounds. All other church services and business are performed virtually.

YELLOW PHASE (Cautious reopening <25 gather): For low risk groups/individuals and within the constraints put forth by governance, begin to allow small groups for Sunday services in the church building, potentially multiple different times with appropriate cleaning before and after, and while maintaining strict social distancing guidelines. Allow immediate family for baptism. Most other activities, services and business will continue as virtual for all risk groups.

***BLUE PHASE** (Early transition <50 gather): Continue virtual content across the board for high risk groups. For lower risk groups continue small group Sunday services, committee meetings, pastoral care, mission work, youth programs and tenant groups. Expand repertoire of in-house service with modified practices for communion, offering, prayers and music. Choir/singing remains limited or excluded, or is pre-recorded, for example. Baptism, weddings and funerals may include immediate family and limited guests

***EARLY GREEN PHASE** (Aggressive mitigation lifted <100 gather): Continue virtual content across the board for high risk groups. For lower risk groups, expand options for programs to meet as small groups and continue services with modifications. Cautious reentry of the choir program with more stringent dispersal guidelines.

GREEN PHASE (early unrestricted): Continue virtual content across the board for high risk groups. For lower risk groups, resume regular services with continued physical social distancing measures in place and with modified practices. Cautious reentry of the choir program with more stringent dispersal guidelines.

UNRESTRICTED PHASE: Back to normal when we get there. May consider continued virtual presence.

*Note these are not part of the official PA reopening plan, but represent theoretical transitions based on local conditions and reflect the plans observed in other states.

PHASE	closed	<25 gather	<50 gather	<100 gather	early unrestricted	Unrestrict
Group A Increased risk; elderly or other comorbid health risks; high risk of exposure recently.						
Church Services						
*Sermon / in house service	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	virtual + small groups	
*Baptism/Weddings/Funerals	Deferred	Deferred	Deferred	Deferred	immediate family	
*Communion	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	virtual + modified IS	
*Music/choir	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	instr/recorded/solos	
*Prayer to the people/peace	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	virtual + in service	
*Offering	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	virtual + in service	
Christian Nurture						
*youth group	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	
*childrens church	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	
*adult education	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	
Fellowship	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	
Pastoral Care	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	
Committees	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	
Mission						
*Harvest Fair	Virtual	virtual	Virtual	virtual	small groups	
*Mission (with travel)	Virtual	virtual	Virtual	virtual	virtual	
*Mission (local)	Virtual	virtual	Virtual	virtual	small groups	
Tenant groups (aa/alanon/etc)	Virtual	virtual	Virtual	small groups	small groups	
Group B Normal risk, have had some increased exposure as essential worker or other need.						
Church Services						
*Sermon / in house service	Virtual	Virtual	virtual	virtual + small groups	virtual + small groups	
*Baptism/weddings/funerals	Deferred	Deferred	immediate family	family and guests	family and guests	
*Communion	Virtual	virtual	virtual	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	
*Music/choir	Virtual	virtual	virtual	instr/recorded/solos	dispersed	
*Prayer to the people/peace	Virtual	virtual	virtual	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	
*Offering	Virtual	virtual	virtual	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	
Christian Nurture						
*youth group	Virtual	virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	
*childrens church	Virtual	virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	
*adult education	Virtual	virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	
Fellowship	Virtual	virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	
Pastoral Care	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	small groups	
Committees	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	small groups	
Mission						
*Harvest Fair	Virtual	virtual	virtual	small group	small group	
*Mission (with travel)	Virtual	virtual	virtual	virtual	small group	
*Mission (local)	Virtual	virtual	small group	small group	small group	
Tenant groups (aa/alanon/etc)	Virtual	virtual	small group	small group	small group	
Group C Lower risk, have sheltered in place with limited contact.						
Church Services						
*Sermon / in house service	Virtual	virtual + small groups	virtual + small groups	virtual + small groups	regular service	
*Baptism/Weddings/Funerals	Deferred	immediate family	family and guests	family and guests	regular service	
*Communion	Virtual	virtual	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	
*Music/choir	Virtual	virtual	instr/recorded/solos	dispersed	dispersed	
*Prayer to the people/peace	Virtual	virtual	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	
*Offering	Virtual	virtual	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	virtual + modified IS	
Christian Nurture						
*youth group	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
*childrens church	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
*adult education	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
Fellowship	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
Pastoral Care	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
Committees	Virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
Mission						
*Harvest Fair	virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	
*Mission (with travel)	virtual	virtual	virtual	virtual	modified	
*Mission (local)	virtual	virtual	small groups	modified	modified	
Tenant groups (aa/alanon/etc)	virtual	virtual	small groups	small groups	modified	