



Guidance from the Presbytery of Donegal for Churches for the Yellow Phase

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ -- I Thessalonians 1:1-3

Preparing to Move From “Red” To “Yellow”

First, well done! All our churches and fellowships have found ways to continue to worship, connect in fellowship and member care, and serve their communities. We commend you for your fortitude and faithfulness. Now, what comes next? While we recognize how difficult it was to cease in-person worship, pause face-to-face activities, and move to other ways of being church, we also know that there was a simplicity to it—the “light switch went off.” We all worked hard to make light in a different way. Through this we have learned many things. God has been with us. The Leader Team and the Connecting Our Ministries Commission (COM) bless your work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.

The process of resuming in-person activities will be much more gradual and complex—less like flipping a light switch and more like sliding a dimmer. Over the next few months, there will be opportunities for groups to gather in person—but they won’t look the same as they did two months ago. There may be a resurgence of the virus and the need for more sheltering-in-place. Each session has the responsibility to grapple thoughtfully and prayerfully with a series of complicated questions and determine the next steps for their unique congregation, taking into account congregational size and demographics, ministry opportunities, and risk factors. **For this next stage, each session will need to create an individualized plan in accordance with guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).**

As we prepared the final draft of this guidance, the news broke that some officials in two of our counties—Lancaster and York—have announced intentions to independently move their counties to the “Yellow” Classification on May 15, 2020. This is in defiance of the Governor’s order that all three of our counties remain in “Red” until at least June 4, 2020.

To be clear, the Presbytery’s prohibition on in-person gatherings remains in effect as long as the county in which a church is located is classified as “Red” by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (We also have one congregation, Slate Ridge Presbyterian Church, which is located in Harford County, MD. We are working individually with them for their next steps.) The criteria that have been set to reduce risk have not yet been met in any of the counties of Donegal Presbytery. Another story has just broken

questioning whether insurance coverage is valid if a business has resumed in defiance of the orders of the Commonwealth.

Once the county in which a church is located is moved to the “Yellow” classification by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (www.governor.pa.gov/process-to-reopen-pennsylvania/) it is the responsibility of the Session to adopt and follow a plan for resuming in-person worship and activities. The best guidance of the Leader Team and the COM to our congregations is that caution and prudence are in order. Until testing is more widely available, until contact tracing is widely implemented, and until more is understood about how this dangerous virus spreads, all gatherings bring risk. Needed accommodations will be cumbersome, costly, and open to human error. Do not feel the need to rush ahead of your capacities for safety. Across the country, many churches are choosing to continue and build upon their present arrangements for the time being.

Developing Your Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities

Here are the basic principles for resumption of in-person activities when your county is moved to “Yellow.”

1. **Limited gatherings of twenty-five people or fewer will be permitted, with significant disease-mitigation measures in place.** Strict social-distancing measures will need to be taken, including keeping people who do not live together at least six feet apart at all times. All participants over the age of two will need to wear facemasks, unless the person has medical conditions that prohibit the wearing of a mask. Aggressive new disinfecting, hygiene, and other safety protocols will need to be adopted.
2. **All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place.** Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to public environments, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate from vulnerable residents. “Vulnerable” is defined by the CDC as:
 - a. Elderly individuals.
 - b. Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.
3. **Churches should continue to offer and encourage participation in remote opportunities for worship, study, and fellowship** for those who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person gatherings.
4. **Any decision-making bodies (sessions, boards, committees, etc.) that meet in-person must also offer the option to join meetings remotely**, via telephone or video conferencing.
5. **Each session needs to adopt their own “Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities”** to address areas such as worship, fellowship, congregational care, Christian education, children’s

programming, youth activities, and mission engagement. Please submit the plan to the Donegal Presbytery office. Review and consultation are available as you develop your plan.

6. **Churches are not required to resume any in-person activities.** Sessions have the authority to proceed as slowly as they believe prudent, and the Presbytery will support them in a decision to wait to resume gathering in-person.

Guiding Documents

To aid Sessions in the development of their Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities, resource documents are being sent with this guidance. We recommend this “short-list” of resource documents offering comprehensive guidance:

1. The draft seventeen-page document from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) which we have titled [“CDC Guidelines for Re-opening Facilities and Resuming Activities.”](#) This is the document that provides detailed guidance for Faith Communities, Schools, Child Care Centers and other entities. This document was obtained by news outlets and has not been issued officially. It still offers comprehensive expert guidance in one place and will be very helpful regarding the sobering considerations for re-opening your facility for worship and activities. (The guidance directed specifically to faith communities begins on page 7. But other sections of the document may also be useful as you consider building operations, children’s programming, and other aspects of your ministry.)
2. [“Returning to Public Worship: Theological and Practical Considerations”](#) from the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the PC(USA).
3. [A Compendium of Considerations and Advice](#) produced by Presbytery of Donegal Leader Team and COM members.
4. [A Comprehensive Worksheet from the Leader Team and COM](#) to guide your session in developing your plan.

There is a plethora of other resources available. We are posting resources that come to our attention on the Presbytery COVID-19 page and also sharing links to other sites that are aggregating available information.

We offer the following advice:

1. Don’t be afraid to think in stages—not everything needs to happen at once. Different churches will make different decisions about meetings, worship, Bible study, children’s activities, and youth ministry. Not everything needs to happen at the same time.
2. Be aware that some of our churches have already notified us that they may not be able to resume in-person worship and activities until there is a vaccine or it is safe for large groups to gather. Do not feel pressured to resume in-person gatherings if you do not believe you can make safe arrangements. Your plan could be to continue your present arrangements in accordance with the Presbytery of

Donegal April 20, 2020 Guidance www.donegalpby.org/resources/covid-19-response-and-resources/ and to expand ways to offer remote connections.

3. Make shorter term plans – for the next month or two. Review this plan weekly and make adjustments as you go. Communicate with the congregation that you will be making adjustments. Ask for input and advice and take into account the level of risk people are prepared to assume for themselves and others, as well as what medical professionals say is safe.
4. Make longer term plans – for the next several months. These plans will take into account what you have learned in the short term and assess what to continue, modify, and discontinue.
5. Once you have developed a plan, send it to Stated Clerk Michael Wilson and Executive Presbyter Erin Cox-Holmes for their review and assistance. The Leader Team and COM will also receive your plans and are available for consultation.

Concluding Pastoral Counsel

Sisters and brothers in Christ: moving through recoveries from natural disasters (whether they are tornadoes, hurricanes, or global pandemics) takes spiritual and emotional resilience. Leaders feel “up” and then “down.” The COVID-19 pandemic affects our entire world in a way never before encountered in (at least) modern history. We are in this for the long haul. We counsel pastors and other leaders to find ways to rest, to take vacations, and to acknowledge when there is doubt and fatigue, as well as when there is gratitude and trust.

We also affirm that “when two or three gather” Jesus is present and God is worshiped—whether that is in person or across a distance. The church exists for the mission of God in Jesus Christ. We will continue in preaching the Word, administering the Sacraments, serving the “least of these,” and being a covenant community of disciples—even as we figure out new ways to do this.

God bless you and your ministry in these days,

On behalf of the Presbytery of Donegal Leader Team and Connecting Our Ministry Commission



Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes
Executive Presbyter



Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson
Stated Clerk



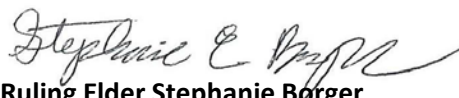
Rev. Matthew Randolph
Co-Moderator of the Leader Team



Rev. Sarah Kneier
Co-Moderator of the Leader Team



Rev. Dr. Steven Fritz
Connecting Our Ministries Commission Chair



Ruling Elder Stephanie Borger
Guidelines Team Chair