



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

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

-- 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Preparing to Move From “Yellow” To “Green”

Greetings and, once again, 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. You have continued to encourage one another. You are building one another up in a pandemic world! Certainly, through this we have learned many things. God has been with us. Now, what comes next? We will all continue to work hard to worship, care, and participate in God’s mission in this time. 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 is gradual and complex. We have moved from the “Red” phase to the “Yellow” phase and now all of our counties are moving to the “Green” phase of our state reopening. **This process is less like flipping a light switch and more like sliding a dimmer.** Over the next few months, as groups to gather in person, the situation will look much the same as “Yellow.” Let us be clear – “Green” does not mean “Go.” “Green” does not mean instantly resuming activities as prior to COVID. There may be a resurgence of the virus and the need for more sheltering-in-place. Put your “Yellow” and “Red” plans on file in case they are needed for the future.

Each session has the continued responsibility to grapple thoughtfully and prayerfully with a series of complicated questions. You must determine the next steps for your unique congregation, taking into account your size and demographics, ministry opportunities, and risk factors. **As with “Yellow,” each session will need to create and adopt 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.).** (www.governor.pa.gov/process-to-reopen-pennsylvania/) If you are adapting your “Yellow Plan” as the basis of your “Green Plan,” please note that essentially the only change is in the recommended size of group gathering. Remaining the same are medical concerns about congregational and choir singing, sanitation protocols, concerns about vulnerable adults, advice about air flow and air conditioning, and caution about food and beverages.

The best guidance of the Leader Team and the COM to our congregations is that caution and prudence are still in order. We reiterate that the change from “Yellow” to “Green” phase does not mean that all activities revert to “Before COVID” status. All gatherings continue to bring risk. Continuing to practice

social distancing, wearing face masks, washing our hands frequently, and sheltering in place if you identify as higher risk, are all ways that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Continuing to take these precautions are ways we can demonstrate to one another, “You matter; your health and safety matter to me.”

In the following guidance you will see information from the “Red to Yellow” phase guidance document repeated, with some additions and slight edits. Accommodations adopted for the “Yellow” phase continue to be required. Gatherings larger than twenty-five people are permissible for those counties in the “Green” phase. 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 “Green”:

1. **Gathering sizes may increase to 50% capacity, or up to 250 people, whichever is lower, with continued significant virus-mitigation measures still in place.** Strict social-distancing measures will need to be maintained, 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 face masks, unless a person has a medical condition(s) that prohibit the wearing of a mask. Current disinfecting, hygiene, and other safety protocols remain in effect.
2. **Restrictions on congregational and choir singing** are still in place (see referenced resources in “Guiding Documents” section).
3. **Air handling in enclosed spaces much be addressed. Information regarding air flow and air conditioning** in facilities is available (see referenced resources in “Guiding Documents” section).
4. **In the “Green Phase” some congregations are providing sanitizing supplies in restrooms for self-cleaning between uses and arranging for custodial cleaning after building use.**
5. **Session’s are advised to refrain from in-person communion at present or use pre-sealed elements.** In the same matter, any food at events should be prepackaged.
6. **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 home with them. 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.

7. **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.
8. **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.
9. **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.
10. **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.

Guidance Documents

This list of resource documents has two additions due to new information and questions that have surfaced since guidance was last provided, namely, questions about indoor air flow and air conditioning recommendations and corporate singing and choir resumption.

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. From the **Presbyterian Association of Musicians** is a response to restrictions on singing in the time of COVID and contains a resource list for churches.
3. From the **American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers** (ASHRAE) contains resources on air conditioning, air flow and quality.
4. **“Returning to Public Worship: Theological and Practical Considerations”** from the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the PC(USA).
5. **A Compendium of Considerations and Advice** produced by Presbytery of Donegal Leader Team and COM members.

6. **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

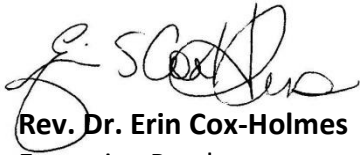
Sisters and brothers in Christ: moving through recoveries from natural disasters (whether they are tornadoes, hurricanes, or global pandemics) takes spiritual and emotional resilience. Leaders feel “up” and then “down.” The COVID-19 pandemic affects our entire world in a way never before encountered 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 “when two or three gather” Jesus is present and God is worshiped — whether 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. Thank you for the way that you have encouraged and built up one another in these days.

God bless you and your ministry,

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



Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes
Executive Presbyter



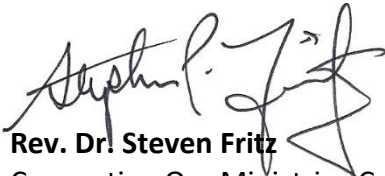
Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson
Stated Clerk



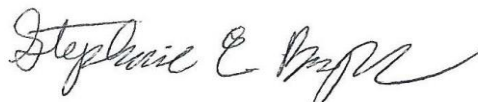
Rev. Matthew Randolph
Co-Moderator of the Leader Team



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