

## Planning Worksheet for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities in the Green Phase

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The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Green Phase indicates that infection rates have declined somewhat, and that area hospitals have space to treat sick individuals. However, COVID-19 is as dangerous as ever, especially (but not exclusively) for those who are older or have underlying health conditions. As people begin to engage in more public activities, the opportunities for community spread of the coronavirus increase—therefore, the church's obligation to care for and protect our members and our broader communities is especially urgent in this phase.

As researchers have learned more about the virus, we've discovered that most cases of COVID-19 are transmitted through the droplets and aerosols produced by breathing, speaking, and singing. **Therefore, the most vital safety measures for churches who choose to resume in-person gatherings are (1) strictly enforcing a six-foot physical distance between people who do not live together and (2) requiring everyone over the age of two years to wear a mask that covers both the mouth and nose.** While transmission via surfaces is a less significant risk, attention to hand hygiene, building sanitation, and other safety measures remains important, as well. **In the Green Phase, vulnerable individuals are to continue sheltering in place, so offering remote opportunities for worship, faith formation, and fellowship remains absolutely essential.**

In order to help keep congregants and neighbors safe, each session is responsible for creating a Green Phase Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities, in accordance with guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the CDC, and the PC(USA). This can build on the good work our sessions did in planning for the Yellow Phase, but it will also involve new challenges. While the accommodations necessary for safely gathering in person are cumbersome, they are an important part of our call to be the church with integrity and love in this moment. We urge church leaders to present actions like mask-wearing and social-distancing as Christian practices for loving our neighbors and to lean into this moment as an opportunity to grow in faithfully responding to Christ's call to self-sacrificial love of others—both inside and outside our congregations.

To assist sessions in this endeavor of resuming in-person worship and activities, the Leader Team and COM have created this detailed list of questions to guide your deliberation and planning. We hope and pray that, guided by the Holy Spirit, grappling with these questions together will help you discern what faithfully and lovingly resuming in-person gathering might look like in your unique context. As you work on your plan, Presbytery staff and members of the Leader Team and COM are available to consult and assist. Please submit your Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities to the Donegal Presbytery office. Answers to the following questions should be included in your church's plan. (Not every question

will apply to every congregation, but we urge you to consider carefully and diligently all that are relevant to your context and ministry.)

## Growing into the Future

1. What new or renewed forms of ministry, new technological capacity, and new ways of making the life of the congregation more accessible did you develop during this pandemic that you can carry into your future ministry?
2. What new mission has God given you during this time?
3. Which practices do you most sorely feel the lack of and want to prioritize resuming when it becomes feasible to do so safely?
4. Which things that seemed necessary a few months ago have you discovered you might be able to let go of?
5. Are there ways that a change in pace and activities has benefitted leaders and members of your church? What rhythms will be life-giving as you begin to resume more activities?

## Worship Location

1. When your county enters the Green Phase, do you plan to . . .
  - Continue to conduct all worship remotely
  - Record or livestream worship services from the church building, with a group of worship leaders and tech crew physically gathered
    - How will you ensure that appropriate physical distance is maintained between people—twenty feet for singers and six feet for all others?
    - How will you ensure that people wear masks and that everyone washes/sanitizes their hands upon arrival?
    - What other safety precautions need to be taken?
  - Invite some or all of the congregation to attend worship in person
    - How will you ensure that the number of people gathered does not exceed 250, or the number who can be seated in your space while maintaining a six-foot distance? What will you do if more than this number arrive for a worship service?
    - How will you ensure that vulnerable individuals (the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions) shelter in place while others are invited to attend in-person worship? What will you do if a vulnerable individual arrives for in-person worship?
    - How will you ensure that worshipers stay at least six feet apart at all times?
    - How will you ensure that all worshippers over the age of two years wear masks and that everyone washes/sanitizes their hands upon arrival? What will you do if someone arrives without a mask?

- Medical and vocal experts caution that some research indicates that singing and projected speaking (such as preaching) may spread minute aerosols that travel up to 20 feet and will stay in the air for hours. Research is ongoing, including whether a plexiglass shield would contain droplets and aerosols. Will those leading worship wear masks? If not, how will you keep the congregation at least twenty feet away from any people without masks?
  - How will those who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person services be able to participate in the congregation's worship?
  - What provisions will you make to monitor the flow of people as they arrive and leave (e.g. what doors do people use, do people stagger their arrival time, will people be dismissed one row at a time)?
  - Will you make provisions to take temperatures, check for other symptoms, or administer tests (when available) as people arrive?
  - What other safety precautions need to be taken?
- Hold "drive-in" worship services
    - How will you ensure that all worshipers remain in their vehicles, with all windows closed, for the duration of their time on church property? If windows are permitted to be opened, how will you ensure that all vehicles remain at least six feet apart and all people are wearing masks?
    - How will you ensure that vehicles only contain the members of a single household?
    - How will those who do not drive be able to participate in the congregation's worship?
- Hold worship services outdoors when weather permits
    - How will you answer all of the questions listed above in the section titled "Invite some or all of the congregation to attend in person"?
    - What will you do if the weather is inclement?
    - How will you measure outdoor airflow to determine whether wind is likely to spread airborne droplets?
    - Enforcing social-distancing and mask-wearing could be much more difficult outdoors. How will you approach this challenge?
    - Will gathering outdoors make it more challenging to livestream or record worship for those who are not able to attend in person? How will you address those challenges?

## Worship Service Elements

(See "Returning to Public Worship: Theological and Practical Considerations" pages 13-19)

1. Since medical and vocal experts tell us that group singing is among the riskiest congregational activities for spreading COVID-19, how will you safely incorporate music into your worship services? [See the Presbyterian Association of Musicians' document "Church Music and Covid-19" for](#)

[more information.](#)

2. How will you instruct congregants to pass the Peace of Christ without physical contact?
3. What alternatives to touching shared surfaces (hymnals/Bibles, attendance pads, bulletins, offering plates, door handles, etc.) will you implement?
4. What is your plan regarding celebration of the sacraments? The best medical advice is either to refrain celebrating Communion in-person or to use pre-sealed elements.
5. What other changes to your typical worship service might be necessary?
6. If your custom is to have a fellowship time before or after worship, how will you need to alter or suspend this practice?

## Mission & Outreach

1. Are there forms of local mission or outreach that you suspended, but that you might be called to reinstate now? If so, how can you do so safely for all involved?
2. What new opportunities for serving and caring for your neighbors have you developed in the past months and you believe that God is calling you to continue? What new opportunities are you called to engage as we move into an uncharted future?
3. How is God compelling you to use your building for mission-critical ministries (such as recovery groups or hunger or homeless ministries) even when this use requires you to make provisions for scheduling, cleaning and disinfection?
4. If you operate a preschool, do you believe you can realistically follow the CDC's guidance for child care programs (found on pages 1-3 of the CDC re-opening guidelines)? **A church or preschool board that operates a preschool should consult with their insurance provider for liability considerations and other area preschools for regional planning. When the decision is made to re-open, the preschool director and the session or preschool board should work together to create a detailed plan for resuming operation of the preschool. If your church hosts an externally-owned and operated preschool that receives government funding, then that preschool must consult with the corresponding agencies for re-opening protocols.**

## Meetings

1. When your county enters the Green Phase, do you plan to . . .
  - Continue to hold all meetings remotely
  - Permit the session, trustees, board of deacons, committees, and/or staff to meet in person
    - How will members who cannot yet safely or comfortably gather with others attend meetings remotely and fully participate in discussions and votes? Any decision-making body that meets in-person must also offer the option to join meetings remotely, via telephone or video conferencing.
    - What new technology, equipment, or expertise will you need to enable participants to call

- or video-conference in to primarily in-person meetings?
    - How will you ensure that all in-person participants wear masks and wash/sanitize hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized?
    - What meeting space will best meet your technological and social-distancing needs?
  - Permit Bible studies, small groups, and/or adult Sunday School classes to meet in person
    - How will you ensure that all in-person participants wear masks and wash/sanitize hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is reduced?
    - How will people who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person gatherings access faith formation and fellowship opportunities remotely?
    - Can the option to join Bible studies/small groups/classes remotely be offered? What new technology, equipment, or expertise would you need to enable participants to call or video-conference in to primarily in-person meetings?
    - What meeting space will best meet your technological and social-distancing needs? Can some types of gatherings be held outdoors?
2. If the session opts to allow the possibility of in-person meetings, how will decisions be made about which meetings happen in person and which happen remotely?

## Children's & Youth Ministry

(For preschool considerations, see the section on Mission and Outreach. This section covers other children's and youth ministries.)

1. When your county enters the Green Phase, do you plan to . . .
  - Continue to offer all children's and youth ministry remotely
  - Offer in-person activities for middle/high school students
    - What types of youth programs can you safely hold, and which will need to be modified, cancelled, or postponed? Could gatherings be held outdoors
    - How will you ensure that the group contains fewer than twenty-five people, that all participants wear masks and wash/sanitize hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized?
    - How will teens/families who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend/send a child to in-person gatherings access faith formation and fellowship opportunities remotely?
  - Offer in-person activities for older elementary-aged children
    - What types of children's programs can you safely hold, and which will need to be modified,

postponed, or cancelled? Could gatherings be held outdoors?

- How will you ensure that everyone—including children—wears a mask and washes/sanitizes hands upon arrival, that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized?
- How will children/families who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend/send a child to in-person gatherings access faith formation and fellowship opportunities remotely?

□ Offer in-person activities and/or nursery care for preschool-aged and younger elementary-aged children.

- Since infants and small children cannot practice social distancing, cannot safely wear masks, and cannot reasonably be prevented from touching objects and putting things in their mouths, we recommend delay in implementing nursery, pre-school, and younger elementary-aged activities. Added to this is the fact that many volunteers are in at-risk categories due to age. The first question to answer is “Do you think that this can be done safely?”
- How will you minimize the extent to which toys, materials, and other items are shared between children?
- How will you implement a frequent and intensive disinfecting regimen?

2. How will you equip parents to engage in faith formation and religious instruction at home?

3. How can your teachers, youth leaders, and children’s ministry volunteers (especially those who cannot yet safely or comfortably attend in-person gatherings) continue to build relationships with and nurture their students remotely?

## Building Management

1. What is your plan for cleaning and disinfecting?

- Worship spaces?
- Meeting rooms?
- Classrooms, nurseries, and children’s areas?
- Offices and staff workspaces?
- Doors, entryways/vestibules, and other high-traffic or enclosed areas?

Refer to the CDC website for guidance: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html)

2. How will you manage the cleaning and disinfecting of restrooms after each use?

3. Do you have an adequate supply of approved cleaning supplies, soap, and hand sanitizers available? What is your plan for keeping these supplies in stock? What will you do if you run out? If hand sanitizer can’t be obtained, how will you manage hand-washing for all people entering the building? (Refer to the the EPA website for guidance on effective cleaning agents:

[www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2](http://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2))

4. Which rooms/spaces will best facilitate social distancing, ease of cleaning, and remote participation in gatherings via technology? Which rooms/spaces should not be used for the time being?
5. How can you rearrange seating areas to promote social distancing in worship spaces, meeting rooms, and other parts of the building?
6. How will you manage the traffic flow to maintain social distancing in hallways, entrances/exits, and other tight spaces?
7. Which windows and doors can be propped open while people are in the building, to increase the flow of fresh air?
8. Some research indicates that air-conditioning system may dramatically increase the range in which droplets and aerosols spread. Will you use air-conditioning?
9. Will your church office be open to the public? If so, what new procedures will you need to implement?
10. How will you provide for deep-cleaning and disinfection if it is discovered that someone known to be infected has been in the building? (See CDC guidelines for specifics.)
11. If community groups use your church building, how will cleaning and disinfection be handled? Will they be asked to share in the costs of extra custodial work if the church performs the cleaning? How will you ensure compliance with your safety standards if they provide the cleaning?

## Staff

1. The Green Phase urges that employees continue to work remotely where possible. Will your expectations about what portion of time staff spend working from the church building change when you enter the Yellow Phase? If so, what new safety procedures will need to be implemented? How will more work hours spent at the church impact your building's cleaning and sanitizing needs? (Refer to CDC Guidelines for workplaces.)
2. If multiple people are working at the church building simultaneously, how will you ensure that a six-foot distance between people is maintained, that masks are worn when necessary, and that touching shared surfaces is minimized? Will individuals need to perform their own disinfection after restroom or kitchen use?
3. How will accommodations be made for pastors and other church staff who are vulnerable individuals, or who live with a vulnerable individual in their household?
4. How will you help pastors, staff, and others with leadership responsibilities in worship or other programming avoid the temptation to come to in-person activities if they feel unwell?

## Pastoral Care

1. How will pastors, deacons, Stephen Ministers, and others safely and compassionately offer pastoral care to people in lower-risk groups?
2. How will pastors, deacons, Stephen Ministers, and others safely and compassionately offer pastoral

care to people in higher-risk groups?

3. How will pastors, deacons, Stephen Ministers, and others safely and compassionately offer pastoral care to hospital patients, nursing home residents, and others in group facilities?

## Communication

1. Understanding that this is a time of uncertainty and rapidly evolving plans, how will you communicate with your congregation in ways that are frequent, are redundant, use various communication methods, and set the needed theological and relational tone?
2. How will you communicate plans for in-person activities in ways that do not pressure people to take undue risks or make people who need to stay at home feel excluded? What theological principles can you draw upon?
3. How will you communicate the importance of social distancing, mask wearing, group size limits, and other safety practices to those who might be resistant? What theological principles can you draw upon?
4. How will you encourage congregation members, leaders, and staff to stay home if they are feeling unwell or displaying any COVID-19 related symptoms?
5. How will you help those joining in-person events remotely to feel and function like full and active participants and not passive observers?
6. How will congregational leaders make an extra effort to connect with those who are unable to attend in-person gatherings?

## Special Events

1. How will you ensure that all protocols for safe worship services are implemented at funerals? What additional safe forms of ministry can you offer to the bereaved? (See “Returning to Public Worship” pages 15-16.)
2. How will you ensure that all protocols for safe worship services are implemented at weddings? In what additional ways can you safely celebrate those who are getting married? (See “Returning to Public Worship” pages 15-16.)
3. Are there any situations in which you would consider serving food or beverages? The best guidance is to refrain from serving any food or beverages during the Yellow Phase. If there is to be food at an event, then the best guidance is to offer prepackaged food and beverages. If other food service is to be offered, then the Interim Guidance for Restaurants and Bars in the “CDC Guidelines for Re-Opening” (beginning on page 12) offers comprehensive advice on safe facility management and food handling procedures.

## Being Prepared

1. How will you compile and maintain accurate lists of those who attended church activities in case those records are needed for contact-tracing?

2. What will you do if someone who attended a church event tests positive for COVID-19 or suspects they might have COVID-19?
3. If there is a resurgence of COVID-19, your county could be placed back in the Yellow or Red Phase by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, at which point the Presbytery's mandate to suspend all in-person activities would go back into effect. How will you remain flexible and prepared for this possibility?
4. How will you make decisions about when and how your Plan for Resuming In-Person Worship and Activities might need to be adjusted over the course of our time in the Green Phase?