

Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church COVID-19 Re-entry Task Force

To support Kentucky United Methodist congregations and clergy, the KYUMC COVID-19 Re-Entry Task Force has approached re-entry decisions prayerfully and collaboratively. Because we know evidence and science has determined that large gatherings are the most dangerous venues for community-wide viral outbreaks, the following recommendations are offered as a way for pastors and church leaders to discuss plans for each phase of re-entry and communicate decisions to the local congregation. The Re-Entry Task Force has attempted to follow state and federal guidelines with the understanding that regional outbreaks, local church preparedness and other factors will mandate varied and flexible timeframes for reopening. We also realize that each congregation serves in a different context and will need to make decisions based on specific local executive orders. Based on many variables, we fully anticipate re-entry may occur at different times in different places. Regardless of the local situation the Re-entry Task Force recommends that utilization of church facilities and in-person worship occur in *three distinct phases*.

Phase I - Preparing Facilities and Congregational Members for Re-Entry

Phase II - Re-Entry into Facilities and Worship

Phase III - Sustaining Safe Facilities and Health of Congregational Members

Furthermore, because the COVID-19 pandemic is evolving and to assist congregations with changes or updates the following will occur:

- In consultation with the Bishop, Cabinet and Conference representatives, the Re-entry Task Force will continue to meet and make recommendations.
- A KYUMC Conference COVID-19 web page will be established for all communications and important helpful information for clergy and churches. The COVID-19 web page will also include a “questions” tab so that clergy and churches may submit questions. A member of the Re-entry Task Force will respond to questions.
- A network of health ministry nurses and health experts is being established to assist at the regional (district) level during the re-entry and ongoing phases.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease transmitted by inhaling droplets from infected persons. While COVID-19 is a very different illness than the flu, it similarly is transmitted through droplets. Droplets can rest with active viruses on durable surfaces for hours or days, depending on the surface and environment.

In short, the concerns are:

1. Immediate vicinity of COVID-19 infected persons where droplets from coughs or sneezes or breath can be inhaled by other people.
2. Droplets from sneezes or coughs from infected persons on surfaces.

Current symptoms of COVID-19 can be found on the CDC website. [Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)

Throughout all Phases of Re-entry, the following is recommended for clergy and congregations:

- Be Informed - keep up to date on executive orders given by state and local officials.
- Practice good hand hygiene (wash hands or use 60% alcohol based hand sanitizer).
- Stay at home if you are not feeling well. This includes pastors, church staff and volunteers.
- Maintain recommended social distancing (6 feet) at all times in all places.
- Wear masks as recommended by local and state guidance.
- Limit face to face meetings, continue teleworking/meeting when possible.
- Establish an effective and timely communication plan for all congregational members.

Do No Harm - We care about our vulnerable populations.

As we re-enter our church facilities and worship spaces, we must make decisions and communicate clearly with our most vulnerable populations in mind. These are people most susceptible and most at risk to COVID-19 and it is fully anticipated they will want to continue to worship online. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines vulnerable populations as:

- Individuals over 65
- Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, and asthma
- Individuals whose immune system is compromised (E.g. cancer, chemo and radiation therapy)

Please keep in mind the following: Just because we can reopen does not mean every church facility is ready to reopen. Churches should prayerfully discern the safest time for their congregation to re-enter church facilities and host worship services.

Phase I - Preparing Facilities and Congregational Members for Re-Entry

Step 1. Communication Plan - Churches should establish an effective, intentional and timely communication plan for all congregational members. This will inform the congregation about the steps taken to create a safe and healthy space. This is also especially important should services need to be canceled due to outbreak or other emergencies.

Examples of effective communication plans include:

- Email distribution lists
- Social media sites (FB, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- Alternative ways to communicate with church members that may not have technology - a phone tree is a great example.

Signage in the facility is a great form of communication and should offer clear directives to attendees regarding upholding the guidelines. Churches should mark designated entrances, exits and building traffic patterns, mark sanitizer stations, remind people to practice social distancing, hand washing, and not to touch their faces. In posted signage, digital communication, and verbal instruction, use positive, encouraging language that reflects hospitality, while maintaining a commitment to loving our neighbor and doing no harm.

Step 2. Team Effort - Recommend clergy and administrative councils jointly make decisions regarding re-entry.

Churches may want to consider a *Re-entry Task Force* to assist with re-entry recommendations at the local church level. This task force could be composed of a representative from Trustees, Finance, Worship, SPRC, Key Staff, Lay Health Advisor (nurse, physician, etc.)

Example Duties of Re-entry Task Force

- Keep informed and review guidelines and recommendations as they are available.
- Serve as support for clergy and congregation.
- Make recommendations to Ad Council or other entities.
- Assist in reviewing guidelines and training volunteers to assist with re-entry into facilities and worship.

Step 3. Cleaning and Preparing Church Buildings and Worship Spaces

- Prior to re-opening, churches should consider the need for increased usage of cleaning supplies, hand soap and hand sanitizer. Make arrangements to secure an ongoing supply of needed items. Discuss with custodial staff/volunteers any changes that are required to meet enhanced disinfecting standards. Please see KYUMC Web page for suggested cleaning directions/supplies.
- Individuals conducting cleaning prior to re-entry should wear masks and gloves during the cleaning process.
- Deep clean church facility including pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches and microphones using a list of approved chemicals and disinfectants. [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- Disinfect all common areas and surfaces and do not use areas for social gatherings.
- Consider limiting restrooms to one person at a time. Larger bathrooms could accommodate more than one person, but the recommendation would be to, for example, force the spacing by “closing” every other urinal or stall.
- Maintain ample hand washing supplies in restrooms and provide sanitizing stations throughout the worship area and facility.
- Find directions from CDC here: [Interim Recommendations for US Community Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- Remove all items from pews and backs of chairs where COVID-19 virus might live. This includes hymnals, Bibles, attendance record pads, pens, children’s worship bags, etc.
- Post signs about social distancing, hand sanitizer areas, no handshaking, non-contact greetings, and proper handwashing. Please see KYUMC COVID-19 for templates and posters.
- Commonly used surfaces should be sanitized **before and after** any gathering. This includes pews, meeting tables, kitchen surfaces, etc. Current research indicates that the novel coronavirus can live up to three days on a dry surface.

- Hand sanitizers should be touchless if possible and at every entry as well as near pews.

Phase II- Re-Entry into Facilities and Worship (Thinking Forward)

Step 1. Masks

- All persons attending in-person worship services must wear a mask throughout the entire service, including clergy and other service participants when not actually engaged in leading the service.
- Congregations should have a supply of masks on hand that can be given away, but it is recommended that people bring their own.
- Please see the [COVID-19 Resources](#) page for ways to make masks or purchase them.

Step 2. Social Distancing in Sanctuaries, Facilities and Worship Spaces

- Maintain 6 feet of social distancing, not just once people are inside, but from the time they leave their cars, as they enter the worship space, and as they exit the space and return to their vehicles.
- Social distancing requirements dramatically reduce the seating capacity of a congregation's worship and fellowship spaces (25% of pre-COVID-19 seating). For example, to maintain a six-foot distance between households in the sanctuary, every other pew or row of chairs should be empty.
- Each pew or row should be no more than half-filled.
- Congregations should calculate the seating capacity for social distancing.
- Develop and communicate a plan for social distance seating.
- Ushers and greeters should be trained to maintain social distancing and safe practices in the facilities and designated worship space.
- Families who live in the same household should sit together.
- If multiple services are offered requirements for cleaning before and after each service are operative.
- Follow state guidelines for Healthy at Work for staff working in shared office space. Find these guidelines at www.HealthyAtWork.ky.gov

Step 3. Consider Worship Components Carefully

Logistics

- **Microphones-** Members and worship leaders should not pass or share microphones at any time. If possible, consider the use of wind screens, sanitized and replaced after each service.

- **Bulletins** - It is recommended that bulletins and other non-essential touchable items not be used in Phase II. If bulletins are utilized, they could be placed in the pews for designated seating prior to each service. Members should take the bulletins with them once they are touched.
- **Entrances/Exits/Hallways** - Decrease the number of individuals touching doors by propping them open or have one person open doors for those entering/exiting. Sanitize all door handles after gatherings.
- **Visitors/Hospitality/Greeters** - Maintain social distancing practices at all times. No contact greetings (no shaking hands or hugs). Have masks available for visitors if needed. Dismiss in an orderly way to ensure social distancing. No coffee stations or food, snacks or meals at this time. Greeters should inform guests of expectations regarding precautions regarding distancing, hygiene and wearing of masks. Ensure doors are propped open for ventilation and so that doors need not be touched.
- **Offering** - Online giving should continue and be encouraged for those able to do so. Churches should design a method of receiving an offering with a box, basket or bucket in an established place where people may drop their offering. Individuals who count money should use gloves to count and prepare the deposit.
- **Technology** - This is an opportunity to leverage technology. Consider providing digital material for services ahead of time or project information in the sanctuary.
- **Multiple services** - Consider offering multiple services to encourage greater opportunity for social distancing.

Choir/Music Ministry and Congregational Singing - Some of the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Kentucky were traced to a choir rehearsal.

- Singing is a very efficient and effective way to spread the novel coronavirus.
- Choirs should not lead gathered worship music until late in Phase III.
- Choirs should not assemble at this time.
- Consider instead using soloists, duets, or small ensembles where a greater than recommended social distance can be practiced.
- If congregational singing takes place, masks are absolutely necessary and should be worn during singing.
- Worship leaders should rethink how to include music with pre-recorded solos and video projection.
- Churches should begin to think into this very carefully; especially, related to special events, Christmas, etc.

Nursery and Child Care/Children's Ministry

- As long as local and state guidelines do not allow child care centers to open, churches should not provide nursery or child care.
- Children will need to sit with their families during worship.
- A children's moment may still be a part of worship; however, children should remain seated with their families while someone speaks to them from the front of the worship space. Childcare and children's ministries may resume in Phase III.
- It is recommended that children under 2 not wear a mask. See for more information: [Cloth Face Coverings for Children During COVID-19](#)

Youth Ministry

- As long as local and state guidelines do not allow youth activities (E.g. sports, summer camps), churches should not provide gathered youth activities.
- Youth should remain with their families before, during and after worship events.
- Playgrounds and outside spaces should also be closed to children and youth activities during this time.
- Youth ministry activities may resume in Phase III.

Food and Meals

- For the foreseeable future (late in Phase III) and probably until a vaccine is widely available, food, beverages, potlucks and shared dinners/receptions must be avoided.
- Touching serving utensils and movement along a food line is extremely contagious.
- Late in Phase III, a congregation might consider catered, plated dinners with servers. This minimizes proper distancing and contact with surfaces and utensils.
- In addition to the above, seating for a congregational meal will require appropriate social distancing.

Resurgence and Outbreaks

This "new normal" will continue for the foreseeable future until there is a breakthrough regarding a vaccine. Churches should continue to offer online worship and discipleship, and be prepared for resuming online-only worship should there be a resurgence of COVID-19 in our state or in your community. A resurgence of COVID-19 or an outbreak in a community or church will mean communities and states may return to Healthy at Home. Should a COVID-19 case be confirmed in a church setting, local health departments will be notified and contact tracing and possible quarantine of congregants may occur. Health ministry navigators will be available to assist local churches as needed.

Guidelines for Drive-In Worship

Churches may consider offering "drive-in worship," although guidelines must be followed to do so safely.

- Coordinate with your local law enforcement or emergency management agency.
- Utilize volunteers or signage to direct parking.
- Everyone, including volunteers, staff, and clergy, must follow social distancing guidelines at all times.
- Only members of the same household per vehicle.
- No one should leave vehicles for any reason.
- No bathroom facilities.
- No playground.
- Park every other spot

- No one exchanges anything including offering and communion elements.

Phase III [Thinking Forward]- Sustaining Safe Facilities and Health of Congregational Members

Phase III information will be forthcoming and will include the components listed below. Many of the Phase III components are dependent on state and local guidelines.

- Facility Operations and Staff Health Screening
- Communion
- Baptism
- Weddings
- Funerals/Memorial Services
- Resumption of in-person Children's and Youth Ministry