



RESET 
RESTART
RENEW

best practices for resuming in-person worship

Checklist: Returning to In-Person Worship

Responsibly returning to in-person worship amid an ongoing pandemic requires thoughtful preparation, intentional planning, and the careful implementation of [recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The [health risks of COVID-19](#) apply to clergy, staff, volunteers and church members and visitors. In some cases, because of the nature of church functions, the risk for clergy, staff and volunteers might be greater than for others. Practices and work settings should be adjusted to appropriately lower the risks to clergy, staff and volunteers, with special attention to [those at high-risk because of age or pre-existing health conditions](#).

This checklist is designed to help church leaders re-initiate in-person worship onsite – a step-by-step guide for churches at the beginning of their planning, a good review to enhance the work of churches that are well into that process.

Prepare

- [Survey your congregation](#) to gauge their comfort with in-person or other forms of onsite worship, such as drive-in services, before you make any decisions.
- Meet virtually with church leadership and staff (custodial staff, health adviser, worship committee, trustees, etc.) to create a plan for re-entry.
- Discuss how returning to in-person worship might create anxiety for some people – especially those in [high-risk populations](#). Depending on your context, your church might consider delaying in-person worship.
- Require attendees to wear a mask, [in accordance with CDC guidelines](#). [Purchase disposable masks](#) or [make plenty of cloth masks](#) for those who do not bring one.
- Schedule a rehearsal before your first in-person worship service.
- Check with your insurance company to see if it has additional protocols you need to follow before returning to onsite activities.

Communicate

- Go beyond your traditional communication formats – social media, website, email, telephone, text messaging and more – to reach as many members as possible.
- [Communicate clearly and consistently](#):
 - The date you plan to return to in-person worship
 - What worship will look like (new start times? different location? shorter service?)
 - Any new processes and guidelines
 - What will be expected of all who attend (wearing masks, social distancing, no singing)
- Post signs prominently throughout your facility – parking lot, doorways and all spaces – to help remind attendees of the new expectations.
- Make sure signs contain helpful, concise and clear information about what is expected of attendees. Use large type on signs, so they can be read easily from several feet away.
- Include signs that serve as real-time reminders of DHEC and CDC health guidelines.

[Download and print posters from DHEC](#)

[Download and print posters from the CDC](#)

- Remind members that they do not have to attend in-person worship if they would not feel comfortable or safe doing so. Instruct those who are not feeling well and those in [high-risk populations](#) to remain home and continue to worship virtually.
- Give your members explicit permission to not attend, and encourage everyone to respect the choices of others.
- Notify your [district superintendent](#) as soon as you set a date to resume in-person worship.

Clean & Disinfect

- The temporary shutdown or reduced operation of a building and reductions in normal water use can create hazards, such as the growth of mold and the bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease. Both can show up within days or weeks of a prolonged shutdown. Before you begin cleaning, [read this important guidance from the CDC](#).
- Purchase at least three months' worth of disinfection supplies or hire someone to clean and disinfect your worship space.
- [Clean and disinfect the church](#) before the first service. Create a plan to clean thoroughly high-touch and soft surfaces frequently, especially between services.
- Buy at least three months' worth of [hand sanitizer](#), hand soap and other personal cleaning supplies for everyone to use. Before worship and between services, make sure you have enough hand-washing and hand-sanitizing supplies available.
- Rope off doorways and spaces that will not be used.
- [Download and print signs](#) to post around your church to remind members and visitors about proper handwashing, social distancing and other ways to reduce the spread of the virus.
- Post signs telling people that restrooms are off limits, unless there is an extreme emergency.
- Remove all items – Bibles, hymnals, pencils, attendance pads, etc. – from pews. Encourage members to bring their own Bibles to church.

Protocols for Leaders & Volunteers

- ❑ Postpone smaller gatherings outside of worship (Sunday school, family reunions, etc.) until further notice. Encourage these groups to meet virtually.
- ❑ Post one volunteer at each entrance to open and close doors before and after worship, to reduce the need for attendees to touch doors.
- ❑ Churches with capacity issues should consider establishing pre-registration for worship services to:
 - Manage appropriate social-distancing seating guidelines and avoid having to turn congregants away.
 - Create a list of attendees to contact in the event that someone who attended worship tests positive for COVID-19 later in the week. [Read CDC guidelines about contact tracing](#).
- ❑ At the very least, assign a volunteer as “attendance tracker,” recording names of those in attendance, should need for contact tracing arise.
- ❑ Instruct attendees to sit at least six feet (roughly two arm-lengths) apart from each other. Families who live in the same home may sit together. Mark seating places on pews.
- ❑ If your church offers options for giving online, by smartphone app or bank draft, encourage members to give in these ways.
- ❑ If your church does not offer digital giving, [consider doing so](#).
- ❑ Place a box or bucket where attendees can place their tithes and offerings as they enter and leave church. Health experts recommend leaving checks and cash in the box for at least two days before removal.
- ❑ Recommend non-contact alternatives for “Passing the Peace” (smiling, waving, slight bow of the head, crossing your arms over your heart). [More ideas](#).
- ❑ Shorten the service, when appropriate to your context.
- ❑ Post signs and make announcements explaining why you are [not including communal singing during worship](#).
- ❑ Provide enough microphones and other equipment so worship leaders do not need to share them.