



**Covid-19 Guidelines Update
Monday, May 11, 2020**

“All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.” 1 Cor. 10:23

As of Sunday, May 17th, by the order of our governor, congregations are permitted, but not required, to hold inside services with 50 percent of the building’s capacity. Though I’m sure some would make a different case, I think it is more prudent to wait until May 31st or longer, giving everyone time to assess the effectiveness of Phase 1 of the governor’s plans. Other denominational bodies, including the Episcopal and Lutheran bishops of Virginia, are advising “not yet.” Out of an abundance of caution, I hope sessions will consider waiting until Phase 2 has been approved, and even then, safety and compassion should govern our decisions more than what is legal. I am confident that those who decide to worship inside will take the precautions that are essential for their context.

One additional consideration: Church members will voluntarily attend or refrain from worship, depending on their self-assessed risk of contracting Covid-19 or contaminating others. For paid staff, such as pastors, church musicians and custodians, a session’s decision will compel their participation. If your paid staff are at risk, or if members of their family are at risk, consider postponing face-to-face worship until such time everyone can be safe.

By Carl Utley, Transitional General Presbyter

When reopening church - a Guide from the Presbytery of the Peaks

By Chad McCain, Jill Allen MD, Mark Hinchcliff, Morgan Whitfield, Carl Utley

The following guidelines are modifications of guidelines circulating nationally.

1. Arrange your worship, meeting, or gathering space so that no more than 50 percent of its capacity is filled. Remove chairs from your sanctuary, block off pews, whatever it takes to ensure that family groups can maintain a cautious distance of 6 feet. No one should sit directly behind another.
2. Require masks and have hand sanitizer ready. Worship leaders who do not use masks while leading worship should maintain an extra safe distance of at least 15 feet. Each person should clean hands upon entry.
3. Prior to any gathering, ask each member to self-screen, using the following questions. If self-screening is unlikely to take place, consider Sunday morning screening by an usher or greeter. A positive answer to even one should compel an individual to stay home:
 - a. Am I or anyone in my household vulnerable to Covid-19 because of age or a compromising medical condition?
 - b. In the last 14 days have I experienced any of the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, difficulty breathing, experienced a sudden loss of taste or smell?
 - c. Have I traveled by train, plane or ship in the last 14 days?
 - d. Have I been in contact with anyone diagnosed with Covid-19? Or worked in a facility with a diagnosed case of Covid-19?
 - e. If I attend, can I resist normal contact with people, and can I comfortably follow safe practices while with others?

4. Before and after each use of the building, conduct a thorough sanitizing cleaning.
5. We recommend that churches suspend hosting outside groups and committee meetings unless people agree to the very stringent protocol that mirrors the safe practices of the worshipping congregation. Check with your insurer to know what your liability is in case of an outbreak from your church.
6. Where possible, consider adding digital worship and meetings through YouTube, Facebook Live, or similar services, to include those who choose to stay at home for health reasons or those who are homebound.
7. Fellowship gatherings should be postponed until conditions have returned to normal.
8. No physical contact should be included in the morning worship. Instead of handshakes or hugs, people should greet one another with a nod of the head, or bowing, or waving.
9. Modify the method for collecting offering – using a stationary collection box, the mail, or electronic methods – instead of passing an offering tray.
10. Communion should be modified or suspended, conducted without passing a tray around the sanctuary.
11. The National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorus America, the Barbershop Harmony Society, and the Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA) strongly recommend that group singing be curtailed until such time that there is a vaccine or cure for Covid-19. Research and anecdotal reports have shown singing to spread the virus more quickly than talking or coughing.
12. Baptism, weddings, and funerals should be conducted according to the same guidelines as general worship.
13. Cancel Summer VBS unless Phase 3 of the state’s recovery has been approved by the governor, if Phase 3 permits such gatherings.
14. Postpone children’s church until Phase 3 of the state’s recovery has been approved by the governor, if Phase 3 permits such gatherings.
15. Insurance- Call your insurer. Is there a liability if people attend a gathering at your church and subsequently fall ill, or if there’s damage while the building is unoccupied, or the possibility that you have a business interruption provision that might help with finances? Policies vary, so you should contact your church’s insurance broker to review your coverages and exclusions. Some insurance companies have posted information on their websites concerning issues during the pandemic event.
16. Precautions and Procedures in case those “in the know” fall ill or choose to stay home – does more than one person/household know (and where do you find) the:
 - Session records, Emergency contact numbers and protocols
 - Lock down steps to ensure safety, Passwords and login information
 - Email list and program, Financial and computer security systems, Alternate IT support
 - Banking connections, Essential insurance and payroll documents
 - Offsite emergency strategy – where will you shift your operations, Emergency utility shut-offs
 - Transfer of authority if leadership is at risk of quarantine restrictions
 - Updated rosters of congregations and presbytery staff

Resources:

- Beginning Conversations for Re-entry
 - https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/beginning-conversations-for-re-entry.pdf
- Returning to Public Worship Theological and Practical Considerations
 - https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning_to_public_worship_may_2020.pdf
- Wisconsin Council of Churches recommendations (great reference)
 - https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning-to-church.pdf
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>
- <https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>
- [https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-61-and-Order-of-Public-Health-Emergency-Three---Phase-One-Easing-Of-Certain-Temporary-Restrictions-Due-To-Novel-Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\).pdf](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-61-and-Order-of-Public-Health-Emergency-Three---Phase-One-Easing-Of-Certain-Temporary-Restrictions-Due-To-Novel-Coronavirus-(COVID-19).pdf)