

PLANNING CONVERSATION GUIDE

Guidelines for Re-Opening Church Buildings and Resuming In-Person Worship

Over the course of the previous many weeks pastors and leaders in the Presbytery of Tropical Florida have been working collaboratively every Tuesday to discuss and discern what it means to be in active ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic. These “experts” have used germane questions as the frame for encountering and engaging conversation.

As sessions of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida hold conversations about the shape and timetable for re-opening church buildings and resuming in-person worship it is strongly recommended that each session work through the following set of questions to develop a policy and guidelines particular for the congregation. This policy and guidelines should be communicated to members as well as to the Presbytery of Tropical Florida. Please email your “Re-Opening Policy/Guidelines” to sandra@tfpby.org.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Questions Your Session Needs to Discuss BEFORE Re-Opening and Resuming

Use the following sets of questions to develop your session policy/guidelines.

Comprehensive Questions:

1. Are people in your congregation in the at-risk category? How does that factor into your planning?
2. Are you okay with people staying at home, and how will you communicate clearly that if an individual or family chooses to stay-at-home is a good and proper decision?
3. How will you communicate the decisions you are making?
4. What plans will you put in place if the pastor or a member of the church tests positive for COVID-19 after you re-open the building or resume in-person worship?
5. What does a phased-in or tiered approach to adding worship, activities, and events look like for your congregation? How will precautions be maintained, loosened, or tightened at different phases or tiers of re-opening and resuming?

Over-all Worship Questions:

1. Masks: Will you require masks to be worn? What happens if someone arrives without a mask?
2. Seating: Will you require people to sit in every other row (or two rows or three rows)? Will you put tape on pews indicating where people may sit to maintain social distancing? Will you put tape on the floor to indicate spacing wherever a line would form?
3. Ushering: Will you use ushers to dismiss people following services so that social distancing is maintained? Ushers should pay attention that others are social distancing and kindly remind those who are not abiding by the principle.
4. Multiple Services: Will you hold multiple services (including for smaller congregations) and assign people to attend a service in order limit the number of people in the worship space at one particular time?
5. Airflow: Will there be constant airflow in order to avoid a stagnation of air?
6. Gloves or Hand Sanitizer: Will volunteers use hand sanitizer or wear gloves?
7. Doors: How will doors be opened for people coming in order avoid contact issues with doorknobs?
8. Bulletins: Will bulletins be eliminated? Will they be emailed for each worshiper to print at home and bring to worship? If they are printed, how will distribution happen and how will you ensure they are not contaminated by those printing and preparing?
9. On-line Worship: How will you continue and maintain your on-line presence for those will not or cannot attend in-person?

Lord's Supper, Baptism, Choir Ministry:

1. Critical: Are these elements critical to worship if they increase the risk to those who have gathered?
2. Precautions: If the session decides to include any of these, then what precautions will be taken to minimize the risk?

Lord's Supper Strategies:

1. Vessels: Do not pass trays in the pews.
2. Coming Forward: Ushers invite people to come forward to insure the maintenance of social distancing.
3. Bread: Provide individual pieces of bread with tongs or while wearing gloves so that only the servers touch the bread.
4. Cup: Use small plastic communion cups.

Baptism Strategies:

1. Have parents hold the child and apply the water.
2. Pastor proclaims the Trinitarian formula as the parents apply the water to the baptizand.
3. Extended family and others are not invited forward to limit the number of people at the font.

Choir Ministry:

1. Start with solos or household groups only.
2. Use trios or quartets that are at a social distance.
3. Keep all singers more than six feet from anyone else because of the risk of projecting particulates while singing.

Passing of the Peace and/or "Meet and Greet":

1. Is this essential to worship if it increases the risk of exposure to those gathered?
2. If it is included, what precautions has the session taken to minimize the risk and how will those precautions be enforced?
3. During Phase 1 or Tier 1 of re-opening and resuming opportunities for "meet and greet" should not be held.
4. Passing of the Peace can be done as a call and response between pastor/liturgist and people *without* turning to one's neighbor.
5. If gestures are included during the passing of the peace they need to be clearly defined: bowing, or touching one's own heart, or prayer hands gesture, etc.

Greeters:

1. Greeters do NOT shake hands with anyone!
2. Greeters must maintain social distancing and wear masks.
3. If things are to be distributed (such as bulletins) the greeter should not hold them but point to a table where they might be picked up.
4. Greeters should be models of social distancing!

Offering:

1. No passing of offering plates.
2. Offering plate could be at the exit.
3. Offerings could be individually danced down the aisle.
4. Continue and emphasize on-line giving.

Christian Education:

1. What are the risks associated with offering children's church? Can you assure families that children will be protected in a different space?
2. What are your plans for Sunday School and Sunday School curriculum? Will you use on-line materials and distribute them in advance or after-the-fact?
3. Could Christian Education events for children continue on-line?
4. Are you canceling VBS or delaying it until late in the summer?
5. For any Sunday School or Christian Education programs, have you discontinued any snack or food service that often accompanies such program? Children should not be eating or drinking apart from the direct supervision of their parents/guardians.

Fellowship:

1. Coffee Hour: Is this critical to the church if it increases the risk to those who have gathered?
2. If the session decides to include coffee hour or fellowship events, what precautions will be taken to minimize risk and how will those precautions be enforced?
3. If coffee is served, it needs to be served by a volunteer wearing appropriate PPE.
4. If food is served, it needs to be individually wrapped and commercially prepared only.
5. Tables for seating must be spread out to maintain social distancing.
6. Deliberate attention must be paid to sanitization of any tables, chairs, or areas where food was served or consumed.
7. It may be safer and more feasible to hold outside fellowship events.

Facilities and Property:

1. What are you doing to sanitize and sterilize your church building? What's your strategy to clean and sanitize your church in real time?
 - a. Cleaning Teams are needed to sanitize rooms before and after every event or worship
 - b. Members of Cleaning Teams need to be "on duty" during worship and every event to sanitize doors, stair rails, restrooms.
 - c. Specific plans need to be put in place for outside groups that you will permit to use the property – how will they be required to follow "your rules" and social distancing. Cleaning Teams will need to sanitize all spaces outside groups have used before they can be used again.
 - d. Bathrooms require special attention. How will you attend to restroom facilities and what rules will you put in place for their use and sanitization?
2. What is your plan if volunteers step down? Will you limit the number of activities that resume? How will this impact your Phased-In or Tiered approach?
3. Will new volunteer and/or paid positions emerge because of COVID-19?
4. Insurance: Attend to any notices or guidelines that your insurance company has issued during COVID-19.
5. How are you attending to your financial realities in this time of COVID-19?
6. Record and maintain accurate attendance rolls for every event and worship (for contact tracing).
7. What staffing needs have changed or will change as you add more digital offerings to your church?
8. What equipment do you need that you do not have?

Communications: HOW WILL YOU COMMUNICATE YOUR PLAN FOR RE-OPENING AND RESUMING TO EVERY MEMBER OF YOUR CHURCH AND EVERY PERSON WHO COMES ON THE PROPERTY?

RE-OPENING WORKSHEET

Comprehensive Questions:

1. Are people in your congregation in the at-risk category? Percentage: _____
2. Are you okay with people staying at home, and how will you communicate clearly that if an individual or family chooses to stay-at-home is a good and proper decision? _____

3. How will you communicate the decisions you are making? _____

4. What plans will you put in place if the pastor or a member of the church tests positive for COVID-19 after you re-open the building or resume in-person worship? _____

5. What does a phased-in or tiered approach to adding worship, activities, and events look like for your congregation (refer to worksheet below)? How will precautions be maintained, loosened, or tightened at different phases or tiers of re-opening and resuming? _____

Charting Instructions:

- ITEM – Refer to the questions outlined on the guidelines sheet.
- VOLUNTEERS – Who will do this task? If there is no one, consider if you should open at all.
- TIER ONE / TIER TWO – What are the perimeters that you will set: timeframe, situation, government/medical clearances, etc.

OVER-ALL WORSHIP

Boxes will expand as they are filled.

ITEM	VOLUNTEERS	TIER ONE	TIER TWO
REQUIRE MASKS			
PRE-ARRANGE SEATING			
SOCIAL DISTANCING USHERS			
MULTIPLE SERVICES			
AIRFLOW			
GLOVE /HAND SANITIZERS			
DISINFECT SURFACES: DOORS			
BULLETINS			
ON-LINE WORSHIP			
ATTENDANCE TRACKING			

WORSHIP ELEMENTS & MINISTRIES

Boxes will expand as they are filled.

ITEM	VOLUNTEERS	TIER ONE	TIER TWO
LORD'S SUPPER			
BAPTISM			
CHOIR			
PASSING THE PEACE			
GREETERS			
USHERS			
OFFERING			
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION			
FELLOWSHIP			

FACILITIES & PROPERTY

Boxes will expand as they are filled.

ITEM	VOLUNTEERS	TIER ONE	TIER TWO
RESTROOMS			
SANCTUARY			
OFFICES			
FELLOWSHIP HALL			
CLASSROOMS			

Church: _____ Date: _____

Minister: _____ Clerk of Session: _____

In submitting this report, we are confirming that our session has discussed the following and has arrived at the following decisions/conclusions:

1. Percentage of people in our congregation in the at-risk category: _____
2. We have determined that we will re-open beginning: _____
 - a. TIER ONE is defined as: _____
 - b. TEIR TWO is defined as: _____
3. We understand that volunteers are what is crucial for the implement of each aspect of re-opening.
4. We have consulted our insurance company concerning our liability as it applies to individuals who contract COVID-19, post re-opening our church.
5. We will continue to be in communication with the Presbytery as the re-opening progresses.

PROPOSED RE-OPENING INFORMATION

ITEM	TIER ONE (Check if applies)	TIER TWO (Check if applies)	DESCRIPTION
Require Masks			
Pre-Arrange Seating			
Social Distancing Ushers			
Social Distancing Greeters			
Consider Multiple Services			
Improve Airflow			
Require Glove /Hand Sanitizers			
Disinfect Surfaces: Doors			
Designate Bulletins Area			
Continue On-Line Worship			
Conduct Attendance Tracking			
Implement Lord's Supper			
Implement Baptism			
Utilize Choir			
Implement Passing The Peace			
Implement Offering			
Implement Sunday School			
Implement Fellowship Meals			
Open Restrooms			
Open Sanctuary			
Open Offices			
Open Fellowship Hall			
Open Classrooms			