

Resuming Church Programming — Resumption Readiness

Lay the groundwork for a safe and successful resumption of church programming through planning in the weeks prior to re-launch. Be sure to understand the federal and state guidance regarding a phased approach to re-opening. Follow the guidance of local health officials regarding physical distancing and allowable group size. Then, consider addressing the following tasks as you move toward re-opening your church:

Prepare the Property

- Survey the building and grounds for obvious hazards or maintenance needs that may have emerged during the hiatus.
- Inspect and clean or repair as necessary HVAC systems prior to their restart.
- Clean the building thoroughly using products endorsed by CDC as effective against Covid-19.
- Acquire a sufficient supply of the necessary cleaning elements to support the increased level and frequency of cleaning necessary for the first phases of program resumption.
- Acquire any new equipment required for resuming programming, such as temporal scan thermometers, portable hand-sanitizing or washing stations, or upgraded electronics for continued streaming of services.
- Contact any vendors/contractors who supply church materials or services, alerting them to the resumption of programming (ie., lawn care, paper suppliers, security, etc.).

Control Access

- Identify which points of entry/exit will be used as programming resumes. Plan for guiding traffic to those entrances/exits while maintaining physical distancing.
- Create and communicate a plan for restricted visiting during office hours when weekly staffing resumes.
- Restrict access to those areas of the property/building which are outside the zones of preparation and approved use for the phase of re-opening.
- Communicate to the congregation those groups for whom a return to church is appropriate during each phase of resumption and why. Additionally, clearly emphasize the maximum allowable gathering and accompanying protocol at each phase and plan for compliance.

Prepare the Congregation

- In the weeks before the resumption of programming, alert the congregation to the steps the church is taking to prepare for re-opening. Enlist their prayer and support while affirming their patience.
- Communicate often and through various media the role the congregation will play in safely resuming services through their compliance with physical distancing, hand sanitizing, wearing masks as appropriate, and observing the limitations of each phase of re-opening. Stress that human behavior is as essential as cleaning in preventing infection.
- Help the congregation envision the process for safely returning to church by providing step-by-step instructions for participation in each phase of resumption. For example, instruct congregants on which areas of parking are allowed; which entrances will be available; where hand-sanitizing stations will be located; how to select a seat in the sanctuary/worship space; etc.
- Inform the congregation about which social media, streaming, or other online services and programs will be continuing as services resume. Ensure the church that care and connection will continue for those people unable to attend in person.

Plan for Physical Distancing

- Reconfigure gathering and lobby areas to support physical distancing and prevent gathering.
- Prepare the worship space/sanctuary and any classrooms for physical distancing by visually indicating safe seating.
- Designate and signpost the direction of foot traffic in main circulation pathways.
- Discontinue use of small rooms and/or reduce capacity for rooms to ensure safe distancing.
- Communicate physical distancing plans to the congregation and ask for compliance.

Site Sanitation Planning

- Reduce the number of common touch points by eliminating hymnal usage, receiving the offering without passing plates, and propping doors open to avoid handle/knob usage.
- Install hand-sanitizing stations at each entrance and exit. When programming resumes, consider enlisting a “monitor” to promote usage of the stations and remind congregants of proper health protocols (frequent hand cleaning, covering of cough/sneeze, no handshakes/hugs, etc.).
- When planning for services, eliminate “passing of the peace” or other socializing as a part of worship.
- Plan to clean/sanitize each area of use between services or programs.
- Remove any shared use items from program areas, such as pens/pencils, pew registers, “usher” tags, etc.
- Clearly communicate the church’s sanitation plan and enlist the support of congregants. Where appropriate, enable DIY cleaning by supplying wipes or disinfectant.

Communication Planning

- Ensure that all church leaders and staff understand and endorse the phased re-opening plan.
- Provide for feedback at each phase of re-opening from leaders and members regarding possible improvements.
- Clearly set expectations for leaders and members regarding physical distancing and hand-sanitizing protocols.
- Prior to the resumption of programming, remind the congregation that changes in the prevalence of the virus and government recommendations could impact services (ie., communicate the possibility that the church may need to scale back services or suspend services if the virus begins spreading in the community at an increased rate).
- Determine and inform the congregation which elements of internet-based ministry will continue or be discontinued at each phase of program resumption.