

# WE ARE THE CHURCH

## a guide to continuing to be church in gathered spaces

Over the past few weeks, the church has transformed in amazing ways ~ learning how to be in community from our individual homes and spaces. We've learned how to record worship and download it so that, not only are our regular members watching our services, but also, friends and family from miles away. Our small groups are meeting over Zoom or Google hangout and we're learning how to care for each other and those most in need with a mind toward health and safety. So, as the church continues to be the people ministering in new and creative ways, what are the important things to know while we look toward a future that includes gathering in shared spaces again?

### DATA DRIVEN

Decisions should be driven by the data. Churches can track new COVID-19 cases at a trusted website such as <https://covid19.healthdata.org> to find confirmed infections for their state. New cases need to have stayed the same or declined for at least 14 days before changing the stay-at-home strategy.

### GRADUAL RETURN

When we begin to imagine gathering again, it should be a gradual return, starting with small groups in large spaces and utilizing the 6' physical distancing guidelines.

### CONSISTENCY

Structure is important to children and families. The situation with COVID-19 will continue to evolve over time. Maintaining an online presence and activities for children and families throughout the rest of the year could continue to foster community and provide continuity.

### STAY CURIOUS

Continue to ask the questions, "What is necessary?" and "How can we do this with the greatest respect for health and safety?"

### KEEP WHAT'S WORKING

Some of our online offerings have been very life-giving and provide a structure to include those who may not be able to return to church. Consider finding ways to continue those practices.

### SHARE LEADERSHIP

Consider forming a group of leaders to talk through your state and city's guidelines on social distancing and safety measures and how to incorporate those measures in your church setting.

## THANK YOU

These facts and insights were shared by Dr. Sonya Heath, professor and infectious disease specialist at UAB hospitals; Rev. Malcolm Marler, Director of Pastoral Care at UAB hospitals; and Rev. Paul Byrd, pediatric chaplain, Children's of Alabama.