

## Considerations for Churches Under Pennsylvania’s Process to Reopen

- Pastors, staff and attendees must stay home if they have symptoms or have been in contact with an infected/possibly infected person. White House guidelines suggest temperature checks.
- Ensure proper distancing of people entering/leaving building and sanctuary. Disinfect spaces between uses.

	RED Phase	Yellow Phase	Green Phase
Physical Distancing	Required	Required	Required unless guidance changes
Masks	Required under governor’s order	Required unless order is lifted	Required unless order is lifted
Vulnerable Population	Stay home	Recommend to stay home	Recommend to stay home. Individuals use discretion
Max Group Size	Prohibited	10	50% capacity

### Ministry Response

Staff	Telework required	Must telework if feasible, limited in-office time	Telework encouraged when possible. Limit number of people in offices at one time
Indoor Worship Services	Online Only. Live stream with smallest possible number of people. Record/stream from home if possible	Online-only encouraged. Max 10 (leaders/worshippers) with masks/distancing	Limited in-person with masks/distancing. Continue online option for vulnerable population.
Outdoor worship (lawn, drive-in, etc.)	Discouraged	Discouraged, as max group size of 10 may be too limiting.	Possible with distancing and masks
Nursery	Closed	Consider <i>if</i> church can comply with state/CDC guidelines	Consider <i>if</i> church can comply with state/CDC guidelines
Council and Committees, Bible Studies/Small Groups	Online only	Online only	With cleaning, masks, and distancing, and online option.
Essential Social Services (feeding ministries, etc.)	Allowed with appropriate distancing, masking and sanitation	Allowed with appropriate distancing, masking and sanitation	Allowed with appropriate distancing, masking and sanitation
Ministry Events	Cancelled or postponed	Cancelled or postponed	Limited. Comply with max gathering size limits, distancing, masks

**NOTE:** While you may not proceed faster than state guidelines, you may choose to move more cautiously based upon your population and context.

# Considerations for Churches Under Pennsylvania's Process to Reopen

May 27, 2020

This document summarizes highlights from the [Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#) and a number of denominational/governmental resources. ***It is not a plan, but a list of things to consider.***

*Pennsylvania plans to proceed with returning to work cautiously. Broad reopenings or reopenings that are not structured around ongoing social distancing, universal masking, or other public health guidance would likely result in a spike of cases and new stay-at-home and closure orders.<sup>1</sup>*

As we consider taking steps toward our new abnormal, our guiding principles are:

- We honor God by caring for the welfare of our neighbors and vulnerable individuals in the congregation and in the local communities
- We model compliance with public health and state official guidelines and good science

On May 23, Bishop Davenport recommended that SEPA congregations refrain from in-person worship services until at least July 1, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

## RED PHASE

*The red phase has the sole purpose of minimizing the spread of COVID-19 through strict social distancing, non-life sustaining business, school closures, and building safety protocols.*

- Worship online only (live or recorded). Leaders are encouraged to record/stream from home.
  - If you choose to stream from church, use the minimum number of people.
- Bible studies, councils, faith formation, etc. should be online only
- Staff should work from home.
- Service ministries addressing essential needs should follow protocols for distancing, masking<sup>3</sup>, cleaning, etc.
- Non-essential travel is discouraged
- High risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place.

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<sup>1</sup> Italicized quotes are from "Phased Reopening," <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/#PhasedReopening>. Retrieved May 27, 2020

<sup>2</sup> <https://ministrylink.org/bishop-davenport-on-opening-churches/>

<sup>3</sup> On April 3, [Governor Wolf recommended that all Pennsylvanians wear a mask](#) if they must leave their homes. Monitor to see if this recommendation changes.

## YELLOW PHASE

*The purpose of this phase is to begin to power back up the economy while keeping a close eye on the public health data to ensure the spread of disease remains contained to the greatest extent possible.*

- Stay at home order lifted, aggressive mitigation (distancing, masks, cleaning) in force
- In-person gatherings of more than 25 persons are banned
- Preparations:
  - Consider professional cleaning of the building, flushing water system, and cleaning air handling system before reopening
  - Evaluate your space and how you will handle and enforce physical distancing, limit attendance, limit entrances, and do any screening (temperature, symptoms) for people entering the building
  - Clearly communicate and post signs encouraging at-risk individuals and anyone with symptoms or who has been exposed to stay at home
  - We suggest that you confer with your conference and ecumenical partners to coordinate reopening to avoid overcrowding the first churches to reopen. Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
  - Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
- **Evidence suggests that indoor gatherings, attended for a significant amount of time, and people are stationary in one room, are not safe at this time.**
  - Consider online-only worship, resuming recording in the sanctuary with as few people as possible
  - Consider how to continue offering online worship for those who are vulnerable or homebound, as well as new audiences you have found online
  - While small gatherings are permitted, this requires adhering to rules for distancing, masks, and cleaning exposed surfaces between every use of the building
  - Worshippers and leaders should wear masks
  - Family units should be separated by at least 6 feet in all directions
  - There is growing evidence that singing, especially indoors, is not safe, as aerosols spread well beyond 6 feet when singing or speaking forcefully.
  - Carefully consider whether or not to offer communion, as it will be difficult to distribute safely and sharing of food and close-contact are discouraged.
  - Churches that gather more than 25 people might consider how to do small-group worship, with appropriate cleaning between uses
  - Plan for how to invite and limit groups to comply with the restrictions
  - Use projection/screens when possible instead of hymnals/bulletins.

- Remove hymnals/Bibles from pews to avoid contamination
- Bulletins, if used, should be single-use and disposed of safely
- Consider how to maintain distancing at entrances/exits, in hallways and parking lots as well as in the sanctuary
- Consider keeping Bible studies, faith formation online-only
- Church councils should meet online only.
- Limit life events (weddings, funerals) to fewer than 25, including officiants
- Staff should telework where feasible, limit office functions
- If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, put your communication plan into action, and cooperate fully with contact tracers.
- High risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place.

## GREEN PHASE

*The green phase eases most restrictions by lifting the stay at home and business closure orders to allow the economy to strategically reopen while continuing to prioritize public health.*

*While this phase will facilitate a return to a "new normal," it will be equally important to continue to monitor public health indicators and adjust orders and restrictions as necessary to ensure the spread of disease remains at a minimum.*

- Churches and individuals must follow CDC and PA Department of Health guidelines
- High-risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, are encouraged to shelter in place.
- Indoor businesses may open with 50% capacity. We recommend churches follow this guideline.
- Mitigation efforts (masks, distancing, extra cleaning) still required under CDC/PADOH guidelines.
- Continue to offer online worship and formation along with gatherings, so that at-risk persons are not excluded.
  - We recommend that you avoid crowding in the sanctuary to the extent possible. Consider continuing to offer multiple services, as people may want to spread out.
  - Watch for public health recommendations on Communion and congregational singing

- Continue to use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Consider removing prayerbooks and Bibles if you will have multiple services. Use bulletins (do not reuse) or screens as alternatives.
- We recommend against offering a fellowship/coffee hour. Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling. Many churches have found online coffee hours to be effective.
- It should be safer for Bible studies and small groups to meet in person with masks/distancing. We recommend maintaining some online options for high risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in public.
- Office functions could resume as normal, with attention to cleaning.
- Groups, teams, and committees could meet in person with distancing and masks, with an online option for those who wish to use it.