

Good morning pastors,

Many of you are following the daily press briefings from our governor and as of today he is still limiting groups to 10 people or less with the stay at home order in place through May 29th. While he is not dictating that churches can't meet, he is encouraging all citizens of Ohio to be careful and cautious by following CDC guidelines and imploring them to continue to maintain this to 10 people or less. Based on the Ohio Coronavirus website the daily numbers are still rising (increased by 724 yesterday) which further solidifies our belief that we should continue to follow these guidelines. We highly encourage each pastor and church to follow the guidelines provided by Governor DeWine.

The District staff have considered and prayed over many concerns and thoughts over these past few weeks of how and when to reopen the churches on our great district. While every church is different in size and location, we concluded that all churches would need to address multiple challenges prior to reopening. Here are just a few:

1. We know thorough sanitizing is necessary to reopen. We also understand that surfaces and places where people might touch objects will need to be cleaned constantly.
2. The cost and availability of PPE is still a big challenge here in Ohio.
3. In some cases churches would need to add extra service times due to the required social distancing. Our at-risk folks would still be advised to stay home. We love our older community and do not want them to ever feel left out.

While we wait for the stay at home order to be lifted in Ohio we want to encourage you to give careful consideration to what is reasonable, responsible and required as we begin to make plans to ultimately reopen our church facilities.

What is reasonable?

It is time to begin working on re-entry plans for the months ahead. As you are developing those, we want to thank you for your congregations as well as for the unchurched.

As you work on the plans, we want to encourage you to use the resource listed below as a guideline for you and your church board to consider.

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

What is responsible?

There has been a lot of debate and dialogue surrounding the "stay at home order" for us here in Ohio, and the Governor's plan for re-opening the state. How does this impact the local church? What will it look like? Conversations run the gamut on what is right, what is fair, and what is reasonable. In all of this, our choice has been to avoid responding from a

place of fear. The decisions are made out of a heart of love for others. The question we ask must not be what is best for me, but rather what is most beneficial for the whole? What is responsible during this time, is to make a decision and plan that is most receptive for the whole. Although masks are no longer required when out in public, the purpose of the mask doesn't escape us. It is to protect others in case we are asymptomatic carriers. This is not a gesture of fear, rather a gesture of love and concern for others. Since, we've been called to Love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, we will make decisions that are best for our community. To insist on hurrying back to the way things used to be to limit who can be a part of our gatherings and who cannot; to disregard the guidelines of our healthcare professionals would be irresponsible. However, to hold off on public gatherings, to ensure that the safety of all our people is at the forefront of our plans is the position we are taking as the District team. We have consulted with the District Advisory Board and they have approved this message.

Many believe that since the virus has not directly affected their community that it isn't going to. However, according to the Washington Post, nineteen pastors from the same denomination have passed due to this virus.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/04/19/church-of-god-in-christ-pentecostal-coronavirus-kills-bishops/>. We also have Nazarene pastors and lay people suffering and dying from the virus in the USA. In these cases, many of these have been directly traced back to church gatherings.

What is required? Based on the following communication from the Family Research Center at <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF20D30.pdf> Although you as the lead pastor must make your own decisions along with your leadership team, the guidance from the District Office at this point is to still maintain the same practices through the month of May as you did in April. We are delighted to hear of all of the innovative means of ministry that you have been learning and using for Kingdom work and thank you for your dedication!

If you want the green light from your District office to reopen, you will need to provide us with the following:

1. Proof that you have checked with your insurance carrier and that you are meeting the conditions required in order to maintain your coverage if you restart ministry inside your church facility.
2. Confirmation that you are implementing best sanitation practices which include ongoing sanitation in many areas of the church.
 - During the initial phases, the use of pew Bibles and hymnals should be discouraged. When they are used, they should be regularly sanitized according to best practices.
 - Do not pass offering plates, but instead collect tithes and offerings in a central collection box (such as a basket placed near the back of the sanctuary). Encourage online giving.

- When administering the Lord's Supper, do not pass around a communal bowl. Provide the elements individually. The goal of these practices is to ensure that multiple people do not come into contact with the same surfaces and objects

3. Confirmation of how you will address social distancing requirements:

- Consider closing certain common areas where people are more likely to closely interact.
- If your church has greeters at the doors, make sure they maintain the six-foot distance from people coming in and make sure people do not hang around in the lobby/entryway. If you have previously included a greeting time (handshakes, hugs) as part of your liturgy please discontinue this when you return.
- Adjust seating configurations to allow for a minimum of six feet distance between people unless they are immediate family members. For churches with pews, consider roping off every other pew.

Thank you for taking the time to carefully read through this communication. We know that these are very different days we are all living in. Please know that your District leadership loves you and is very proud of everything each of you is doing as a faithful shepherd of your flock. We welcome any feedback as we move forward into the month of May.

Blessings,

Pastor Trevor & The District Team