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Spencer - for openers, here's a draft the first couple of sections. Ricardo provided some really great pieces for us to start with!

Priorities for Renewing In-Person Public Gatherings for Worship & Spiritual Practice

Below are recommendations of how to phase a worship-community reopening which aligns with public health priorities and instruction, and is coherent with the direction and priorities of public authorities. We offer this as a framework to guide clergy and lay leaders in making healthy and pastoral decisions with responsible concern for the safety of their members and the wider community, but not as a fixed set of rules that will account for every circumstance. All ministry is contextual and the particular circumstance of a congregation's membership, practices, and physical facility will make some prevention measures more urgent and relevant than others. You should also consult local health officials and your insurance agent as you make decisions.

These guidelines are to be applied in relationship to COVID-19 spread and impact in the community. Ongoing assessment of rate of spread, hospitalizations and mortality in the community – data to be found at the [Durham County Department of Health website](#) – should inform levels of prevention measures used. Your faith-community is responsible for defining specific thresholds, within the framework of community-wide prevention directions, but a responsible plan will prepare to implement more rigorous prevention measures when spread, hospitalizations and/or mortality is increasing, and to reduce prevention measures when those virus impacts are diminishing. It is possible that infections and deaths will increase again, and in that case, physical distancing and other prevention measures would need to be increased temporarily in order to begin reducing spread and saving lives. Improvement will not necessarily be linear. Faith-communities protect health and lives by encouraging careful hygiene, adherence to physical/social distancing recommendations, encouraging people to stay at home if they have any symptoms of illness, and cooperating with contact tracers if they are diagnosed.

[In developing this document, we are indebted to several religious institutions, including UNWC, the NCCUMC, WCCUMC, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the Iowa Conference UMC, etc.]

Some congregations will continue offering online worship services only, and that is the most rigorous prevention of spread through our faith-communities.

Recommendations for Stage 1 of Re-gathering: Meeting Outdoors Together

1. Some congregations are choosing to offer **drive-in worship** experiences. Below are some best practices related to this way of worshipping:

- a. Work with local and county government officials to make them aware of your plans.
- b. Ensure that the gathering is adhering to noise restrictions as well as social distancing guidelines.
- c. Use AM or FM transmitters to broadcast sound.
- d. Do not pass out any bulletins or paper materials in order to avoid cross contamination.
- e. Limit the number of volunteers to 10 and have them spaced out and wearing masks.
- f. If collecting an offering, have an unmanned container that people can deposit money into, without touching, on their way in or out of the parking area.
- g. Use bit.ly or another service for announcements, words to music and scripture.
- h. Remind everyone to stay in their vehicles at all times.

2. Some congregations will begin re-gathering in outdoor worship settings, inside or outside of vehicles. If your faith-community chooses to do so, here are guidelines to ensure more safety and reduce the risk of virus spread:

- a. Minimum of 6 feet social distancing between family units.
- b. Congregational singing remains a risk outdoors so we recommend against singing and urge using alternate methods of bringing hymns to services.

- c. Any part of the service that might be an opportunity for touching should be eliminated.
- d. The offering should be given without physical contact between the congregant and receptacle used for giving. Utilize a non-touch receptacle as congregants leave worship.
- e. If your **faith community church** offers an outside worship service in vehicles with windows open, maintain at least 6 feet of separation between each vehicle.

Recommendations for Stage 2 of Re-gathering – Entering Indoor Space Together

1. Preparing the Building for Reopening:

- a. Deep clean your entire building. While we recognize our buildings have been empty for weeks and the virus has limited potency after certain periods of time, deep-cleaning brings peace of mind and care of facility.
- b. Replace all HVAC filters (furnace, air conditioning, air cleaner devices) and increase frequency of filter replacement.
- c. Consider shampooing carpets and updating areas in need of care, upkeep or maintenance. This time of facility care can focus us on what we can do now to best prepare our entryways, external areas and internal spaces for the return of our congregants and newcomers to our gatherings.
- d. Sanitize pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, water fountains, light switches, and microphones. Provide access to sanitizing-wipes containers at these locations so individuals can wipe down surfaces before or after they touch them.
- e. If this work requires teams, prepare workers to maintain physical distancing, mask-wearing, shift work, etc.
- f. Professional cleaning offering the following services and standards....
- g. Make and post signs throughout the building about preventing the spread of COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html>), through handwashing, not shaking hands, physical distancing, and doing non-contact greetings. Post reminders and ways of practicing safe distancing at all entrances and throughout your building.

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Place these reminders above water fountains, in restrooms and in all high traffic areas. Sample resources may be downloaded from the CDC here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>

Additionally, the Durham Recovery and Renewal Task Force is partnering with local designers and behavioral scientists to create a free toolkit of communications resources that will be available later in June.

- h. [Post signs](#) indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
- i. Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
- j. Ensure that all water systems (drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after prolonged closure to minimize the risk of water-associated illness.
- k. Install hand sanitizing stations at all entrances of our campus and in rooms where people will be gathered.
- l. Install non-contact garbage cans, either with automatic lids or open-topped
- m. Communicate these measures to your congregation and community. Whether through facebook, email, flyers on doors/windows, or letters —tell your congregation and community how you are preparing the [faith community church](#) for their return.
- n. Secure door jams to prop open doors throughout the building to reduce the number of surfaces people need to touch.

2. Organize and Prepare for Ongoing Cleaning and Disinfection Protocols

Facilities should be thoroughly cleaned every night after use. All high-touch surfaces such as tables, doors, light switches, desks, telephones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc... should be disinfected with EPA-compliant disinfectants.

3. Using Common Space Inside for Worship

- a. Explore gathering in the largest space in your facilities, even if not the traditional worship space.

- b. Keep an online meeting option for those who are unwilling or unable to attend your service in person.
- c. If attendance is large enough, offer multiple services to ensure greater social distancing. One way to ensure your services are evenly spread is to have people sign up for a service. You can use Facebook events or other online free ticketing programs, and have people mark which event they'll attend. Remember that if you have multiple services, you will need to clean between each service. You can shorten the service time to help with the timing of cleaning thoroughly.
- d. Equip and train gloved and masked door and elevator greeters to be in charge of opening doors, giving directions to the worship space, and pushing the elevator's buttons. Determine how many volunteers you have available to assist. Limit volunteers to those who do not have preexisting conditions and those who are under 65 years old. Greeters and volunteers should be able to answer questions on procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Instruct them on how to greet post-quarantine: NO hand shaking or hugs.
- e. Where possible, prop doors open.
- f. Instruct worshippers to wear masks, and consider providing masks at the door.
- g. Allow for ample space between worshippers, providing a six-foot radius of space around household units. This will require visibly sectioning seating, and roping-off/closing some rows/pews. Consider placing some kind of blocks in the space to ensure social distancing. Tape, remove chairs, use cones, etc. to indicate the distance needed.
- h. Have an emergency plan to accommodate overflow or attendance beyond safety provisions.
- i. Avoid/refrain from handing out bulletins – all paper resources should be removed from the space. Instead project the liturgy/program, all announcements, and any other textual element of the service on screens. Supplement by emailing and posting online the liturgy/program and other texts in electronic version for people to access on their phones or tablets.
- j. Suspend group singing, by the congregation or a choir. Singing is among the riskier behaviors in spreading droplets/aerosols which can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air, highly increasing the risk of

infection. Therefore, in lieu of congregational and mass choir singing, as an alternative, offer non-participatory music options – performance on keyboard or stringed instruments, or pre-recorded music playing, or a soloist singing alone in a separate room with a microphone transmitting to the worship space.

k. Do not invite children to come forward for a children’s moment, but plan for them to remain with their household throughout the service.

l. Adjust practices of gathering the offering (one place of offering, no passing of plates). Place a basket or box for collecting offerings at entrances/exits, with usher or other volunteer supervision, for touch-free deposit of offerings by attenders. Staff and volunteers handling cash or checks following the service should do so while masked and gloved, with thorough handwashing after offerings are recorded and secured.

m. Have signs posted with instructions for making online offerings electronically.

n. Do not offer a social space with shared food or beverages.

4. Leading Worship in Common Space

a. If multiple persons are leading the service, arrange seating of them to maintain social distance.

b. Have leaders of the service wear facemasks, or speak from behind a firm plastic barrier between them and the congregation.

c. If multiple persons are leading the service, arrange for different stands, lecterns or pulpit space for each as much as possible.

d. If multiple persons will be using and touching a common pulpit or lectern surface, plan and prepare to clean it with disinfectant after each use.

e. Use fixed-place microphones that will not be touched, or have a separate portable microphone for each individual leader. Avoid passing microphones.

f. Provide dismissal directions at the end of the service to assist households with maintaining social distance as they depart.

- g. Do not have a receiving line; encourage distanced greetings by attenders as they leave.
- h. Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, etc. after every use. Keep a record of when each item was cleaned. DO NOT use water. Rubbing alcohol or alcohol-based cleaners are best.

3. Note from Ryan: The next section should lay out practices to follow on the day of worship. This would include: propping open doors, including external doors; requiring face coverings and providing face coverings to those enter without one; providing hand sanitizer at entrances; limiting gatherings in rooms and sanctuaries to allow for social distancing -- at least six feet of separation between families; this should include practical guidance on how to actually achieve social distancing; what to do if you run out of space; how to direct the flow of foot traffic to limit people walking past each other (for example arrows that direct people to enter pews on one side and exit on the other); this section should also provide clear guidance on practices unique to worship, including singing, offering, communion and other practices that may pose higher risk for spreading COVID-19. This section should include that faith leaders give clear direction to their vulnerable congregants (and name who is in that group) to not attend services in stage 2. Also, perhaps considering abbreviated in door services.

Building considerations

1. Keep an online meeting option for those who are afraid or unable to attend your service in person.
2. Offer multiple services to encourage a greater chance of social distancing. One way to ensure services are evenly spread is to have people sign up for a service. Consider using Facebook events and have people mark which event they'll attend.
3. Remember that if you have multiple services, high touch areas will need to be cleaned between each service.
4. Consider shortening the service time to help with the timing of cleaning thoroughly. Some [faith communities churches](#) are moving to having multiple services during the week to allow for cleaning in between service times.
5. Post signs requiring people to wear face coverings in order to enter the building. Place signs at all entrances. Wearing face coverings in doors is one of the main things we can do to keep each other safe. Up to 40% of people with COVID-19 may not show symptoms and may be carrying the virus without knowing.
6. Determine how many volunteers you have available to assist. Limit volunteers to those who do not have preexisting conditions and those who are under 65 years old.

7. Provide hand sanitizer at entrances and throughout the building. Make sure they are regularly checked so that they don't run out of sanitizer.

Seating considerations

There are a number of guidelines that could be considered in determining the maximum seating arrangements. The NCDHHS guidance is that seating should be spaced so there are 6 feet between groups who live in the same household.

Depending on the layout of the building some places of worship may want to consider applying the Emergency Maximum Occupancy (EMO) rule, modified from the rules in place for restaurants. The EMO is the lowest number of people produced by applying the following rules: (i) limit attendees to 50% of stated fire capacity (or, for spaces without a stated fire capacity, no more than twelve (12) attendees for every one thousand (1000) square feet of total footage), (ii) limit the number of people in the space so that groups can stay six feet apart, and (iii) arrange the chairs so attendees sitting in one group are six feet from another group.

1. Seating should be adjusted in order to encourage the required 6 feet physical/social distancing.
2. Consider limiting seating to alternate rows if you use pews.
3. If you use chairs consider using markings on the floor and arranging chairs for family groups (say 4 chairs, depending on the average family size of the congregation) and for singles, ensuring that the distance between each group or individual is at least 6 feet in every direction.

Staff: greeters and volunteers

1. Provide security and enlist ushers to be both inside and outside greeters. Instruct them on how to greet post-quarantine: No hand shaking or hugs.
2. Ensure doors are propped open or have the greeters hold them open. Consider the use of signs for greeters to hold, such as "welcome back", to promote no handshakes or hugs.
3. Greeters and Volunteers should be able to answer questions on procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Train them beforehand if possible.
4. Direct the flow of foot traffic to limit people walking past each other. Either have ushers directing people to enter pews on one side and exit on the other, or consider arrows on the floor or walls that direct people to do the same.
5. Ask families to arrive early so that they can be accommodated in their seats before services. Ask families to wait outside until the ushers accommodate the family units inside.
6. Consider positioning ushers in the parking lot to provide instructions regarding entrance and exit.
7. Count the number of individuals being allowed in the building, and once the sanctuary is full, in keeping within the limits of physical distancing, close the sanctuary.

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8. Once the sanctuary is full, families could choose to do the following:
 - a. Be accommodated in an overflow room - if one exists. If so floor markings should be used to maintain physical distancing.
 - b. Wait until the next service (put in place processes to ensure they will be the next in line to be accommodated).
9. Remember to avoid handing out bulletins, and instead project all announcements on screens. Also do not allow people to come by and pick up bulletins out of stacks.
10. Consider dismissing in an orderly way to ensure there is physical distancing. If you are hosting multiple services, consider having a different exit so that the outgoing attendees do not come into contact with the income attendees.
11. If bathrooms are open, have greeters monitor the bathrooms to ensure hands are washed and social distancing is followed.
12. In larger restrooms, consider blocking every other urinal or sink to allow for more distancing.
13. Consider a temperature check on all staff and volunteers.

Holy Communion and other sacred rites using food

1. Provide prepackaged communion elements. Change the way you offer communion. Avoid passing a plate or bowl. LifeWay.com offers combined elements of communion that can be picked up as people enter – but make sure that people are not picking from a deep bowl.
2. If these cannot be sourced consider encouraging families to bring their own.

Offering

1. Modify the methods used to receive financial contributions by placing a fixed collection box in the lobby (supervised by ushers).
2. Establish a system for electronic donations (if not done so already) and continue to encourage such donations.

Baptisms

1. Baptisms should only be performed if a member of the person's family is able to baptize them.
2. Otherwise, postpone baptisms until the COVID-19 vaccine is in full effect.

Altar Calls and new convert responses

1. Where this is a custom regularly practiced, continue making calls "to the altar" by having people simply raise their hands from their seat for their request. Do not practice physical contact on an individual until it is safe.
2. For those who make a profession of faith, ask them to put their name, email and number

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in a basket in the lobby, or via a form on your website.

3. Have someone contact them and begin their virtual discipleship process.

Amenities: coffee, bulletins and hand sanitizer

1. Restrooms: decide whether bathroom usage will be allowed at this time. If usage cannot be allowed, then it may not be time to return to the building.
2. Do not hand out bulletins. Do not allow people to come by and pick them up out of stacks.
3. Consider including the 3 Ws in your bulletin or any printed worship materials. Wear face coverings; Wait six feet apart; Wash your hands often with soap and sanitizer.
4. Recommend withholding coffee stations, snacks, or groups meals at this time. Stay attuned to the guidelines to know when it is best to reintroduce these services.
5. If restrooms are open be sure to post signs about washing hands in bathrooms with appropriate guidelines to doing so. Have a volunteer team to regularly wipe down the faucets and other high touch areas on a regular basis.
6. Display hand sanitizer throughout the [place of worship](#) church. It may be difficult to obtain at this point, so consider if you should meet in person without this element.
7. Supply masks for those without one to increase comfort levels. Again, these may be difficult to obtain, but consider asking people to make masks as a service to the congregation.

Sunday school and small groups

1. Recommend that you have your [congregation](#) church members enter the building and immediately go into the worship service to be seated. For more information, see the “Staff: greeters and volunteers” section.
2. Consider whether you will have Sunday school or small groups (see previous point). Make sure you’re communicating if and when these classes will resume.
3. Consider dividing your groups to maintain the social distancing standards. You can also allow small groups to use the building on different days/nights if you choose to meet in person.
4. If you do have class, you should clean the doorknobs, water fountains, and other high traffic areas in between uses.

Preschool and children

1. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children 2 years of age and under do not wear masks or face coverings. Please keep this in mind as you make decisions.
2. Here is a good rule of thumb: If you wear a mask, it’s too soon to have your preschool and children areas open. Masks may scare the children.
3. Consider not opening preschool and children on the first Sunday back. Some [faith](#)

communities churches are choosing to reopen the preschool and children areas when schools are open.

4. Pre-register children to limit how many are in any room at a time. Some faith communities churches are starting with a five child limit in each room at first.
5. Limit leaders in the preschool and children's areas to those who do not have pre-existing conditions. Also limit leaders to those under 65 years old.
6. Have extra volunteers to help in the preschool ministry where some children may suffer from separation anxiety after only being with parents for a long time.
7. Have only one person handle child check in stations and do not pass the check-in device.
8. Do not let parents into the rooms and instead drop them off at the welcome desk.
9. Have a check list of what's been cleaned and when in each room.
10. Develop a list of procedures for your volunteers. Train them on this list through Zoom prior to the first meeting.

Singing, choirs, orchestras, praise teams, bands etc

1. Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading droplets/aerosols which can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air. A cloth mask is unlikely to be enough to protect you or your neighbor. Consider limiting singing in the sanctuary when the congregation is gathered.
2. Require all members of choirs, orchestras, praise teams, bands etc to self-certify that they are healthy and do not have any fever or symptoms. Require anyone showing symptoms to not fulfill their function until they have been symptom-free for 14 days.
3. Praise Teams: Do not use the full team if your stage area does not allow the necessary physical distancing. Consider rotations. Assign microphones and use the same one every time.
4. Choir: Consider suspending choir practices as forceful breathing and exhaling can expel the virus further if someone is infected. However, you could consider using smaller numbers as you reintroduce choir to the service. Also space members out appropriately (consider using a diamond pattern with six feet of spacing between members).
5. Orchestras: Keep parts to a minimum and ensure the orchestras are spaced appropriately. Encourage brass players to bring their own towel to catch spit so it doesn't land on the carpet.
6. Consider not using choir robes as space for robe changing may be limited. Just as healthcare workers change or wash their coats after each use, so should the robes be washed.
7. Wipe down music stands after each use.
8. Dismiss the choir in a fashion to allow distancing.

Tech teams

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1. Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, etc. after every use. Keep a record of when each item was cleaned. DO NOT use water. Rubbing alcohol or alcohol-based cleaners are best.
2. Rotate your tech team if possible. Again, encourage those who feel sick or run down to not come into the service.
3. Keep using the online services. Facebook may be more accessible as many people have accounts, but consider other options like YouTube for those who'd like to watch on their smart TVs.
4. Add in text on screens through projectors if you haven't already. This may be a good opportunity to do so.