

GUIDELINES FOR RE-ENTERING WELL:

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESUMING IN-PERSON GATHERINGS IN CHURCH BUILDINGS

The three phases of the Centers for Disease Control guidelines for governors and mayors are based on a foundation of data-driven risk management. Stay-at-home orders are designed to lower the risk of spreading COVID-19. As restrictions are lifted, risk increases. Each governmental agency is responsible for putting in place robust testing, contact tracing, a health care system with adequate capacity, and plans for monitoring specific data. While areas of our Conference may at times be in different phases of responding to the pandemic, here are examples of what it will look like for our churches in different phases.



RISK OF SPREADING COVID-19



LOW RISK PHASE 1

- Stay-at-Home or Safer-at-Home Orders.
- Very limited in-person gathering size based on local government guidelines.
- Essential travel only.



MEDIUM RISK PHASE 2

- Modification of Stay-at-Home or Safer-at-Home Orders.
- In-person gatherings limited (up to 50 people) observing six-feet of social distancing in all directions.
- Business and facility openings will be phased-in per governmental directives and CDC guidelines, hospitals and nursing homes will be among the last to permit visitation.



HIGH RISK PHASE 3

- Lifting all Stay-at-Home Orders.
- In-person gathering size will increase per governmental directives and CDC guidelines.
- Visitation to nursing homes and hospitals per CDC guidelines and institutional directives.
- Increased activities beyond home for vulnerable persons per CDC guidelines.

GOVERNMENT

CONGREGATIONS

- BWC congregations continue meeting virtually for worship, meetings and study.
- BWC congregations designate a Team to plan ahead for disposable Communion sets, hand sanitizer (alcohol content of 60% or greater), disposable masks, approved cleaning solutions, etc. Many of these items are on back-order and may be difficult to find.

- BWC congregations continue to offer virtual worship services, meetings, and study for those who cannot safely rejoin gatherings.
- BWC congregations cautiously discern when to implement plans and provisions to safely reopen buildings for in-person gatherings of 50 or fewer people.
- Continue to strictly follow guidelines from our bishop, the CDC, and governmental directives.

- BWC congregations follow plans and provisions for re-opening Sunday School, nurseries and other programs that weren't safe during Phase 2.
- Continue with CDC recommended practices to maintain health and safety for all people.

REMEMBER WHY THIS MATTERS:

TRANSFORMED LIVES TRANSFORM LIVES

Since March 2020, United Methodist churches within the Baltimore-Washington Conference have responded to the coronavirus pandemic with grace, generosity, innovation, an abundance of faith, and sacrificial love. As one, we are living out Christ's call to be robust in love and certain in our belief that transformed lives transform lives.

Throughout this season of disruption and new ways of being church together, Bishop Easterling and church leaders have stressed that the safety and health of every person is our priority. As government leaders begin to call for the opening of the public landscape, churches are being advised to continue to conduct virtual worship and refrain from in-person gatherings until it is clearly safe to do so. Knowing when it is safe and how to re-enter church buildings safely requires intentional planning.

FORM A RE-ENTERING WELL TASK FORCE

The pastor will ensure that each congregation forms a "Re-Entering Well Task Force" to plan for a phased-in reopening of their building(s) for church gatherings. Ideally, in addition to the pastor, the team would include a health professional (if possible), and a representative from the church's Trustees, Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committee and hospitality team (greeters, etc.).

Congregations without access to each of the recommended members shall form a task force reflective of their clergy and lay leadership. This team should meet virtually to review the 6-page Re-Entering Well Guidelines document and create a plan for the church. Their work will also be informed by the local health department.



Essential Considerations Before Re-Entry

- **WHAT?** Consider the availability of required supplies, such as masks and hand sanitizer, and how you will adhere to all CDC and local health guidelines to mitigate risk.
- **WHO?** Consider the percentage of congregants who are vulnerable to the virus, and take into account the high degree of discipline that will be necessary in order for the pastor and congregation to be vigilant about adhering to guidelines and helping others do the same.
- **WHERE?** Consider the size and configuration of your space(s) including parking lots, foyers, sanctuaries, bathroom, classrooms, etc. and what that means in terms of meeting health guidelines.

KEEP DOING VIRTUAL MINISTRY

Once local authorities deem it safe to gather, there are at least four reasons to continue virtual ministry:

1. Some people have joined you virtually and won't join you physically until they have formed deeper relationships with you and your congregation. Some may choose to remain virtually connected, and you won't want to lose their presence.
2. Some people are more vulnerable to coronavirus and are being asked to stay home until Phase 3.
3. Some people may not be comfortable returning to in-person worship due to fears about the risks involved.
4. If local/state authorities issue a new stay at home order or return to Phase 1, congregations will be required to return to virtual ministry.



STAY INFORMED

There are three jurisdictions within the Baltimore-Washington Conference (D.C., Maryland and West Virginia). Each has or is developing a localized plan with health agencies to interpret CDC guidelines based on local data, including county guidelines. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has created valuable resources for Faith-Based organizations. All of this is available at www.bwcumc.org/gov.



LEARN MORE AT BWCUMC.ORG/RE-ENTRY