



Christ The King United Church of Christ

Making Jesus Famous by Modeling Jesus' Ways

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, Pastor

Our Way Forward

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“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7



Dear Church Family:

This is a time unlike anything most of us have experienced in our lifetimes. We have had moments of joy and moments of deep grief. We've felt the impact of COVID19 intimately among us through the hospitalization of some members and the deaths of others. We mourn deeply the deaths of Bro. Eugene Young, Bro. Gene Lairy (husband of Sis. Sharon Lairy), and all who grieve the deaths of loved ones during this time of physical separation, and we will honor their lives with a service of remembrance when we can once again worship in space together. We have not yet reached that time.

We have had moments of creative ingenuity and moments of overwhelming exhaustion. We entered this season in chaos, but we plan to move through it with great intention. **The church is not re-opening because the church never closed.** We have engaged ministry in new ways. We will continue to move forward in new ways. The ministries of the church are continuing.

There is no way to ensure the overall safety of our congregations and communities until there is a trusted vaccine. In-person worship in sanctuaries is one of the types of gatherings that is most likely to spread the infection. So when we do gather together again, some things we need to consider:

- Over a length of time in enclosed space, airborne viral particles can reach every corner of the room. 6-12 foot physical distancing will not prevent this.
- Speaking, praying, and singing propel the virus even further than breathing.
- Using masks limits, but does not prevent transmission of the disease.
- Common surfaces such as: door handles, offering plates, pews, communion plates, microphones, tables and chairs, can harbor viral particles and be sources of infection.
- **People can be carriers of the virus without any symptoms.**
- We don't know everything about this virus and its impact on all ages. New information is coming out daily. This makes it difficult to predict trends, safety measures, and prevention protocol.
- We are predominantly comprised of populations most vulnerable to COVID 19.
- An outbreak in our church will impact our communities and the capacity of our over-taxed healthcare system.

There is also other data we must consider:

- The number of COVID cases in St. Louis is not yet decreasing.
- Missouri's testing rate falls significantly below ALL federal guidelines. We should be testing 9,700 people/day and we are currently testing an average of 2,800/day. The testing supply is scarce.

• The Governor's decision to re-open is counter to EVERY expert recommendation including the CDC and the Federal Government. I am your Pastor, not a politician and I will not jeopardize your lives for profit margins or political gain.

Below is an interactive map link that will allow you to track the risk of resuming congregational gatherings in every region of our country. Covid Act Now has crucial, real-time modeling and metrics to help America reopen safely. See how your community is doing at <https://covidactnow.org/>."

I have been reviewing dozens of documents and websites on next steps for places of worship. This document is an integration and distilling of those resources tailored for us. We are presenting a phasing forward approach beginning with our current Base Phase and moving through 4 phases that are tied to local conditions and the guidance of local government and health care professionals.

There is no one date that can be universally applied to every church and every community. Things differ; local regulations, building size and condition, age of congregation, size of congregation, health care capacity in community, rate and incidence of spread in community.

But through it all, there are some things that remain constant.

- Buildings have NEVER been necessary to be church**
- GOD is with us wherever and however we gather.**

Levels of the Opening of Church Buildings for Worship in Response to a Public Health Emergency

PHASE ONE

No Live In-Person Gatherings (Stay-at-Home/Most Businesses and Institutions Closed)

CHURCH PROTOCOLS UNDER PHASE ONE

Congregations holding virtual worship, livestreamed or recorded

Bible studies, coffee hours, social gatherings, and meetings via telephone or online

Pastoral care via telephone or online

Continued ministries of service and compassion within protocols of safety

First assessments of economic impact on members of the congregations and wider community--preliminary adjustments of budgets, ministry goals

PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATOR FOR PHASE ONE

COVID-19 CASES, HOSPITALIZATIONS AND DEATHS ARE INCREASING

PHASE TWO

Significantly Limited Gatherings (Some Businesses and Institutions Reopened with Limitations)

CHURCH PROTOCOLS UNDER PHASE TWO

Church offices may reopen in spaces large enough for physical distance to be maintained, with the requirement that proper sanitation measures be strictly adhered to and enforced

Small indoor church worship (under 50 or number designated by civic authorities) may re-start in spaces large enough for 6 feet of physical distance to be maintained between people

Outdoor worship for limited numbers with physical distancing

Restrictive practices for celebrations of Communion

Small group gatherings permitted with physical distancing

Continued health/safety protocols, including the use of masks at all gatherings.

Ongoing care for the most vulnerable, engagement with those assessing the societal impact of the pandemic and advocacy for justice

Next level assessment of pandemic's impact on members of the congregation and community. Forecasting of necessary long-term adjustments of ministry initiatives. Exploration of collaborative partnerships

Virtual worship will still be necessary in all congregations to accommodate vulnerable populations and larger worshipping communities

Pastoral care to those in high-risk categories for contracting the virus remains restricted, particularly for clergy and lay visitors in high-risk categories

PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATORS FOR PHASE TWO

14-DAY CONSECUTIVE DECLINE IN NUMBERS OF PEOPLE TESTING POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, HOSPITALIZATIONS, AND INTENSIVE CARE BED USE

WIDESPREAD TESTING / CONTACT TRACING AVAILABLE TO TRACK THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS

SUFFICIENT SUPPLY OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

EVIDENCE THAT OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS HAVE SUFFICIENT EQUIPMENT AND ARE NOT OVERWHELMED BY THE NUMBER OF CASES

PHASE THREE

**Moderately Limited Gatherings
(More Businesses and Institutions Reopened / Fewer Restrictions)**

CHURCH PROTOCOLS WITH GUIDELINES UNDER PHASE THREE

Increased number of persons allowed for public worship, according to guidelines set by health officials

Continued physical distancing and masking requirements likely

Restrictive practices may still guide the celebration of Eucharist, with gradual easing

Restrictions eased on office/classroom gathering, within guidelines

Larger group ministries (youth groups, camps, classes) may resume within established guidelines

Continued assessments of pandemic impact and prayerful discernment of future ministry

PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATORS FOR PHASE THREE

COVID-19 CASES, HOSPITALIZATIONS AND DEATHS HAVE FALLEN TO NEAR ZERO

WIDESPREAD TESTING AND TRACKING

HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WELL EQUIPPED AND ABLE TO TREAT ALL IN NEED

PHASE FOUR

Unlimited Gatherings with Some Protections

(All or Most Physical Restrictions Lifted)

CHURCH PROTOCOLS WITH GUIDELINES UNDER PHASE FOUR

No limit to the number of worshipers who may attend, except that those who are known to be infectious, actively sick or who display any of the symptoms of being ill should not attend

Worshipers may wear masks throughout the service but masks will not be required

Sacramental worship and community gathering restrictions are lifted

PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATORS FOR PHASE FOUR

A VACCINE HAS BEEN DEVELOPED AND IS AVAILABLE TO ALL IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC

TREATMENT OF PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS IS WIDELY AVAILABLE

TESTING IS WIDESPREAD FOR VIRUS AND IMMUNITY

LIFE AFTER COVID-19: CONTINUED ADAPTATION TO NEW REALITY

The process of reflection and adaptation has already begun. We place our hope in Christ, whose resurrection assures us that on the other side of death, there is life.

POST COVID-19 CHURCH INCREASED MISSION CAPACITY

Both in-person and virtual worship

Both in-person and virtual meetings

Increased engagement in small group gatherings and widespread pastoral care

Increased online giving as well as in-person offerings

Fruitful collaborative endeavors

Right-sizing of building use and capacities to meet a growing mission field

Streamlined, efficient use of financial and other resources

Strategic efforts toward the realization of key strategic mission, vision and goals

Emergency preparedness plans and strategies in place

FORM A

TASK FORCE



We recommend that the pastor form a task force to plan for a phased reopening of the building. Ideally, in addition to the pastor, the team would include a health professional (if possible), and a representative from the Council and hospitality team (greeters, ushers, etc.). This team should meet virtually to review this document and create a plan for the church. Their work will be informed by the local health department.

Three Considerations to Determine How and When to Re-enter the Church Building for In-Person Gatherings

For the health and safety of persons who will attend gatherings, the task force must address the following questions:

- **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.

WHAT?

Before congregations gather, each must ensure an adequate and sustainable amount of required supplies to meet CDC guidelines. Many of these supplies are on backorder. Church leaders should:

- Obtain adequate amounts of cleaning and sanitization products. Alcohol-based surface cleaners are adequate to kill this virus as long as they are 60% or higher in alcohol content.
- Obtain an adequate number of masks for anyone who does not arrive wearing their own. People refusing to wear a mask must be asked to leave and join the service virtually.
- Provide hand sanitizer for those who do not have it and/or install touchless hand sanitizer dispensers at entrances/exits.
- Address the fact that microphones, keyboards, handheld electronic devices, and other surfaces may be difficult to clean or disinfect because they could be damaged if they became wet. A cleanable cover/skin (e.g., keyboard skin) could be used on the item to allow for cleaning while protecting the item.
- Ensure that each microphone will be used by one person during a gathering; they may not be passed from person to person. Sanitize the microphones after each gathering.
- Create signage that assists in communicating core safety messages in a way that is hospitable and caring.

WHO?

It only takes one person to infect many others. Some people who carry the coronavirus may be asymptomatic and not realize they have been infected. When your congregation resumes in-person worship:

- People must:
 - Maintain six-feet of social distancing, not only once inside, but also from the time they leave their cars, enter the worship space, and exit the space to return to their vehicles.
 - Have no physical contact (hugging, shaking hands, etc.).
 - Wear face masks when out in public -- including parking lots and buildings. Ask people to bring masks with them, but have a supply available for those who do not have one.
 - Be vigilant about hand and face hygiene at all times.
 - Sanitize hands each time anything in the building is touched or used.
- People vulnerable to the virus should stay at home with full access to virtual church activities.
- Leaders, identified and equipped by the task force, must take responsibility for enforcing necessary policies to create a safe space for people who come into our church buildings to worship.
- Develop a method to track attendance at worship and other gatherings. This is especially important in case someone becomes ill and contact tracing is required.
- The risk for transmitting the virus is high in nurseries and Sunday School. Plan for children to be in worship with their families at this time.
- The risk for droplet transmission is high for choirs, soloists, and musicians playing brass and woodwind instruments. The current best advice is no choral or congregational singing at in-person worship. Even with the use of cloth masks, droplets can be projected farther than six feet and remain suspended in the air longer.
- The risk for greeters, ushers and Communion stewards is high as most of their tasks do not allow for appropriate social distancing and/or handling items that multiple people touch.

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

WHERE?

The longest projections suggest that the COVID-19 virus will not survive on surfaces for more than four weeks, so expensive professional chemical deep cleans may not be needed prior to re-opening your congregation. However, as a matter of due caution and respect for parishioners, churches should do an extensive cleaning of all door knobs and push-handles, railings, arm rests, pew or chair backs, kitchens and dishware, bathrooms and any “touch” surfaces. Before the congregation returns to your church building:

- Clean and sanitize your facility. This cleaning process should take place **before and after** all gatherings. This may require a change in scheduled worship times.
- The church campus must be prepared to ensure that people may adequately comply with social distancing from the time they enter the property until they leave.
- Signage and ongoing education should offer clear directives regarding safety-focused behaviors that are expected when attendees are present in church buildings.
- Mark designated entrances, exits, and building traffic patterns, highlight the location of sanitizer stations, remind people to practice social distancing, hand washing, and to avoid touching their faces.
 - Consider using every other or every third parking space.
 - Consider using every other or every third pew for family seating. Rope off pews as necessary.
 - Consider exiting by rows instead of all at once, while maintaining the required six feet of social distancing.
 - Consider limiting restrooms to one person at a time. Larger bathrooms could accommodate more than one person with forced spacing by “closing” every other urinal or stall.
 - Remove ALL printed materials from pew racks, instead rely upon projecting Scripture and hospitality messaging or convey information verbally.

In posted signage, digital communication, and verbal instruction, use positive, encouraging language that reflects hospitality, while maintaining a commitment to loving our neighbor and doing no harm.

- Offerings should be collected in secure receptacles near entrances and exits. We advise continued encouragement of electronic offering. A safe method for counting the offering must be implemented including the use of disposable gloves.
- Some experts believe Communion is too risky to attempt at Phase 2 and should only be attempted at Phase 3. If your team decides to provide Communion in Phase 2, the following guidelines must be followed:
 - Purchase prepackaged Communion elements.
 - Place kits on seats or pews before people arrive. Have extra prepackaged Communion elements available so people may take one without touching others (e.g., each kit 1 foot apart): position the table in such a way that social distancing is maintained.
 - Provide waste receptacles at the end of each inhabited pew so that the used Communion elements may be discarded immediately.
 - If you feel vulnerable and don't want to remove your facemask in order to prevent contamination, please take the blessed Communion elements home with you and partake there after thoroughly washing your hands and the elements container.
 - Provide touch-free thermometers in the foyer to monitor temperatures as necessary.

GUIDING QUESTIONS?

1. From this experience, are you reaching people in the community who feel safer worshipping via technology, and can you find ways to connect with them more personally without their having to worship in-person?
 - A. Are there small groups that they can be invited to participate in virtually?
 - B. Are there Bible studies that they can be invited to participate in virtually?
 - C. Are there times of prayer that they can be invited to participate in virtually?
 - D. Are there committees or task groups that they could be invited to join virtually?
2. How will you reduce contact:
 - A. Communion - have bread already cut and cups that are separated enough to not allow others to touch them when taking their cup (do not do intinction, as often fingers slip into the juice by mistake) - people can come up to take a piece of bread and a cup of juice right after they drop their offering in the plate
 - B. Offering - provide a plate/basket where people can place their offering on their way to, or from partaking Communion
 - C. Passing of the Peace - offering ways for people to connect without coming in contact, or even inside of 6 feet of one another
 - D. Worship Bulletins - Email the bulletin as a Word document, or as a pdf so that people can open it on their phones, and/or put the full bulletin with words to songs on a screen (now might be a time to purchase and install a large screen in the sanctuary)
 - E. Hymnals - remove them from the pews to reduce the things that people might touch, and volunteers will need to clean after worship

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. 1 Corinthians 6:12

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."
Psalm 91:1-2*

3. How and what will you communicate to members about decisions and protocols being put into place --- to provide assurance that you are maintaining a safe environment for people to come to?
 - A. How will you invite them to gather again in-person?
 - B. Will you remind people to "Stay Home and Stay Healthy" and maintain social distancing?
 - C. Will you ask each member if they have had contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19? And, if they have, tell them to stay home?
 - D. Will members/guests be told to take their temperature the morning of a worship service, and stay home if they have a temperature?
 - E. Will you advise people who are high risk (e.g., Seniors, immune compromised, health conditions) to remain home?
 - F. Will you advise members/guests to bring their own personal protective equipment (PPEs) like face masks and gloves?
 1. Will the church have additional face masks for people to use and take with them?
 - G. Will you let members/guests know ahead of time that they will not be allowed to make personal/physical contact (e.g., shaking hands)?
 - H. Will you advise members/guests to wash their clothes following each service?
4. Are there ways that you can help families explore and discuss how difficult this quarantine time has been, and the additional strains it has fostered (personal relationships, finances, emotional or physical violence, job changes/loss)?