



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

USA Fields

Preparing to Return to In-Person Congregation Gatherings

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated April 19, 2021

- 1. How were these guidelines developed? Are they straight from the CDC? What other sources were used? Pastors are receiving push back from congregants (or they themselves wonder) as to why we can't meet because of all these guidelines when x,y,z church up the street is meeting. It would be helpful to know how they came up with the guidelines and what source(s) the church is using.**

The following provides a broad general overview of how the guidelines were prepared. It does not include every detail of consideration. The foundation is our commitment to protect the most vulnerable in our congregations, cities, towns, and villages.

The First Presidency prepared the guidelines. Resources and guidelines, from both the CDC and WHO, were consulted. Additionally, various members of Community of Christ Health Ministries Association, and other Community of Christ members in the fields of epidemiology and community health were consulted. Guidelines from other organizations were reviewed including the American Camp Association and various religious organizations (i.e. Wisconsin Council of Churches). Five members of the Council of Twelve representing diverse areas of the church provided feedback regarding field application of the guidelines across the globe. Finally, the Office of General Counsel reviewed the document and provided additional expertise.

- 2. Who gives the congregations permission to open?**

Congregational pastors, with the advice and consent of the mission center president(s) and field apostle, determine when in-person gatherings can begin. The decision to gather in congregational buildings is based on multiple community factors related to COVID-19 and includes local government orders and guidelines, a sustained decline in local COVID-19 cases, the daily number of new cases per 100,000 population, increased testing availability, sufficient hospital beds, and availability of personal protective equipment.

- 3. Do we need to submit a reopening plan for our Mission Center offices?**

Yes, a written plan that everyone has access to, which describes specific protocol is an excellent course of action and models the intention and importance of written plans.

- 4. Do we need to keep a sign-in log for all staff or attendees at services and events?** Yes, in the event of an outbreak among the staff or congregations, it is helpful to add some type of sign-in log with dates and times documenting when people are in the buildings.

5. These rules seem so restrictive – why should we even go back to church?

Some congregations may decide the restrictions are too cumbersome to manage and will determine to move slowly towards preparing to meet in-person. Congregations should delay opening until they believe they can manage in-person worship safely.

6. How long are these rules in place?

In March 2020 as a response to the global pandemic, the First Presidency requested all congregations cease to meet in-person to minimize the spread of COVID-19. In May, the First Presidency released the Guidelines for In-Person Gatherings to assist congregations as they prepared to open their buildings for in-person worship and other gatherings as allowed by local governments. The guidance remains in place as long as the COVID-19 virus remains a risk to our communities.

7. Do these guidelines also pertain to small congregations/groups meeting in a member's home?

Yes. All congregations, regardless of size or where they meet, need to follow the guidelines for in-person gatherings.

8. What if we choose to meet in homes, with just 2 or 3 people present? Would we need to follow the guidelines?

Yes. You are still meeting as Community of Christ and would still need to follow the guidelines.

9. Where can I find information to decide if there is “a sustained decline in COVID-19 cases has occurred for three (3) weeks or as recommended by the local government”?

www.covidactnow.org. Search on your county and then scroll down to the chart labeled “Daily new cases per 100k population.”

10. What happens when the congregation is made up of people who are from multiple counties? How do we decide if there has been a sustained decline?

Many congregations have members from multiple counties or cities who might attend worship services. It is important to know what is happening in all counties or cities surrounding the church and from where members are traveling. Either the church reopening guidelines or local government orders for the county or city where the congregation is located should be followed, whichever is the most restrictive. Please also see question #57.

11. We understand the need for a sustained decline in local cases. What happens when there is a sustained decline in the county/city but there is a specific hot spot of cases, e.g., nursing home or penitentiary that skews the data?

These unique circumstances need to be discussed with mission center presidents(s) and the field apostle. Each unique situation may result in a different timeframe for returning to in-person gatherings.

12. The person we appoint as the Health Officer, are they assuming any personal liability?

No, they are not assuming any personal liability.

13. Households that provide regular caregiving to a grandchild or elderly parent, can they be considered “people who live in the same household” and sit together during worship?

Yes, if they provide regular consistent caregiving they can be considered from the same household.

14. Where do we order supplies (masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, prepackaged juice and wafer)?

Check your local grocery stores or other retailers for some of these materials. Others can be found through an internet search. For example, Amazon, Mardel, or LifeWay may have these items available.

15. My area has different guidelines than the church, which one should I follow?

It is important to comply with the most restrictive guidelines. Also, please see question #57.

16. Will there be some type of communication prepared by the church about different decisions being made by some congregations opening and some not opening that are in the same general area?

Local situations differ. We would expect churches to make decisions based on their own context.

17. As we move into and out of flu season, what will the church have to say about that?

We will continue to monitor state and local guidance regarding large gatherings and adjust as our local governments require.

18. Can I pick up people and drive them to church?

Being in a small, confined space like a car is not advised. We should not be picking people up to drive them to church during this time.

19. Can we give out cloth masks and have the attendees keep them?

Yes. It is also important to have masks available for those who do not have a mask with them.

20. If someone does not want to wear a mask (over 2 years of age), do we have to ask them to leave?

People who cannot or will not wear masks will need to participate in online ministries.

21. How can we safely serve communion?

Some approaches include having the prepackaged emblems available at socially distanced locations on seats in the sanctuary. Another is a priesthood member wearing mask and gloves preparing the emblems and staffing a strategic location where people can pick them up on their way into the sanctuary.

22. The CDC and local health officials say that gloves actually spread more germs because people tend to use them instead of washing and sanitizing their bare hands. Does the church still recommend we wear gloves?

Yes, gloves are to be used in specific circumstances and we are not recommending re-using gloves or wearing them for lengthy periods of time. Gloves are only needed when counting money, serving communion, and picking up offerings. It is still important to avoid touching the face when wearing gloves, and to dispose of gloves and wash hands immediately upon removal.

23. When can I sing in church?

Singing, like coughing, passes the virus to large groups of people. There have been multiple cases documenting the spread of COVID-19 through choirs and through singing at church. Singing is an important aspect of worship. When it is safe, we will sing again.

24. Do I have to wear a mask when singing?

At this point in time, in-person worship does not include congregational singing.

25. If we gather outside, can we sing?

No.

26. If we have a soloist, can they sing?

No. A soloist can project respiratory particles for up to 27 feet.

27. When everyone wears a mask and has social distance, and/or we meet outside, can we sing gently or hum?

Inside or outside, singing of any kind is not allowed. Soft humming, while wearing a mask is acceptable.

28. Could a face shield be used instead of a face mask to help with those who may be hearing impaired to read lips?

No, but there are masks available with clear plastic inserts that may be used when communicating with the deaf or hearing impaired.

29. Do we have to provide masks and sanitizer for everyone?

Everyone should wear a mask. Hand sanitizer should be available for everyone. As places of hospitality and grace, we want to be inclusive and provide personal protective equipment to keep everyone safe.

30. Can I bring my own water bottle or coffee into the church as long as I take it back out with me?

Yes, if beverages are regularly allowed in your sanctuary or building.

31. If the congregation allows a group, such as scouts, to use the building and they do not follow the “rules” are we liable? And do we need to have someone monitoring every event?

All groups who use the congregational buildings will be given a copy of the guidelines with the expectation they will be followed. If groups have questions about the guidelines, pastors should consult with mission center president(s) and the field apostle. We expect groups who use our facilities to follow these guidelines. Scout units chartered by the congregation should have a Chartered Organization Representative from the congregation who attends their meetings and events and should work with congregational leadership to determine if those activities can resume. Scouts carry their own liability insurance for all unit activities. All groups who use the building as a ministry of the congregation should have a liaison or representative present. See the question below regarding building lease agreements.

32. Do people who rent our facilities have to follow our church guidelines too?

Yes. The Guidelines must be provided to those who rent our facilities. Lease agreements must be updated to reflect COVID-19 circumstances.

33. How do we get the “additional language related to COVID-19” to add to our lease agreement for our outside groups?

Contact your MCP/MCFO for an updated contract addendum for all renters.

34. Can AA groups still offer coffee service? What about outside?

No. The same procedures for inside the church building must be followed outside the church building.

35. Do I have to have my church professionally cleaned?

No. You can have your church professionally cleaned, or you can develop a cleaning schedule and protocol based on CDC Guidelines for COVID-19 cleaning.

36. What about UVC systems for cleaning?

That depends. A personal UVC system would not provide the kind of cleaning needed. A professional UVC system could be used to assist in cleaning.

37. Do the bathrooms have to be cleaned after each person uses it?

Yes, it is important to provide bleach wipes in bathrooms to provide for the cleaning of toilet seats, faucet handles, and door handles. Shortening the length of your worship may mean it is not necessary for people to visit the bathroom.

38. What are the recommendations for cleaning and sanitizing the church’s nursery/playroom...i.e. sanitizing toys, etc.?

Some congregations will choose to limit access to the nursery, just as they limit access to Sunday school rooms. Congregations who have the nursery/playroom available for toddlers during worship will need to clean and disinfect each toy or item prior to and after use. Cleaning and disinfecting would also include any furniture or activity items. Eliminating

some toys to make cleaning more manageable, removing all books, including coloring books, are recommended. Bleach wipes should be provided to wipe up surfaces exposed to bodily fluids as well as gloves for those who may be changing diapers. Face masks and hand sanitizer must be available.

39. Is it really necessary to clean before and after services if no one else will be in the building between worships?

Most churches have a variety of users entering and leaving the building. Most churches have multiple key holders and do not require permission for a member to enter the building. We may not know if a person enters the building. Cleaning before and after maintains a clean, germ-free environment, regardless.

40. What happens if one person enters the church after it has been cleaned?

Pastors may not know if a member, who has access to the building, enters the building. It is important to maintain a cleaning schedule and to clean prior to using the building and after using the building. If a person enters the building, immediately after a cleaning, the cleaner will need to re-clean the areas used by the individual.

41. What happens when an outside group is in session at the church and a church member drops in?

A way to minimize COVID-19 spread is to maintain separation between various groups using a church building. Church members should be respectful of other groups and not drop by without notice or permission from the Health Officer or pastor. Expectations regarding masks for everyone in the building should be maintained.

42. Are there situations when we might have to keep people from coming inside? How do I do that?

We offer hospitality and grace. We trust no one would intentionally enter the building if they are sick. Posting signs at the entrance are a good reminder to those entering the building. Cleaning protocols, wearing masks, and providing hand sanitizer become critically important to everyone's well-being.

43. What sacraments can we do at church?

The First Presidency has provided guidance for performing sacraments at church which can be found in the updated guidelines on pages 7 and 8. Marriage may be allowed if social distancing and other guidelines are met regarding capacity, etc.

44. When can I be ordained?

Congregations that have an approved plan to open can perform in-person ordinations by following the guidance found on page 8 of the updated guidelines. Also, online ordination is an option following the guidelines issued in the fall of 2020.

45. The cleaning checklist, and the implementation checklist do not have places for a signature. Can we add a place to sign and date? Is it okay to store these documents electronically?

Yes, you can add a signature and date line to these documents, and they can be stored electronically.

46. How long do we have to keep the attendance logs and cleaning lists?

The purpose of the attendance logs is to provide information to local Health Departments should contact tracing be needed. The attendance logs must be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed after six months. The cleaning list should be kept for six months as well for verification of procedures followed.

47. As AA is “anonymous”; can they put initials on the attendance list and just one contact method?

As long as an individual can be identified through their contact method. The attendance log is for contact tracing purposes only; the information needs to provide contact information.

48. If there is a case, why do we have to close for 14 days when the CDC says only 7 days or that the virus dies after a couple days?

Following CDC guidelines is important. The recommendation was updated on April 5, 2021 and is now that if there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the facility within the last 24 hours, you should clean AND disinfect the space. If it has been more than 24 hours since the person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary. Our understanding of what is safe and what is not safe continues to evolve with the science and congregational leaders are encouraged to monitor the CDC web page for updates.

49. If there is a case and we pay for professional cleaning, do we still have to close for 7 days?

Since the release of the updated guidelines, the CDC released new information on April 5, 2021. If there is a suspected or confirmed case in the facility you should close for 24 hours. Congregational leaders are also encouraged to monitor the CDC web page for updated guidance. We want to provide a safe facility. Professional cleaning may allow a congregation to open prior to 24 hours with the advice and consent of the Mission Center President and Apostle. Pastoral care for members, should a case present, is still an important consideration and may impact timing for re-opening.

50. If there is a case, wouldn't people that were also at the service have to self-isolate for 14 days?

Yes. If a case of COVID-19 has been identified and exposure occurs through in-person gatherings in your congregation, everyone who was present at that gathering should be notified and those who had close contact with the infected individual (within six feet for a total of fifteen minutes or more) would be expected to self-isolate for 14 days.

51. What guidelines are in place for outdoor gatherings? Can we meet outdoors - parking lot church, open assemblies and would the same guidelines apply?

Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings. Congregations may choose to start meeting in their parking lots or on church lawns using lawn chairs as they slowly return to in-person gatherings. Following the guidelines, social distancing, wearing masks and having

hand sanitizer available is still important. Outdoor gatherings also require submitting a plan to the MCP for approval.

52. Do I have to wear a mask if our worship/fellowship is outside?

Yes, it is important to wear a mask to protect others, even when outside.

53. Can members sign a “hold harmless clause” or waiver to state we understand all the precautions being provided, and are self-selecting to attend in-person gatherings, understanding there is no guarantee of “no risk”?

Asking members to sign waivers or hold harmless clauses to attend worship leads to the question of whether it is safe to begin in-person gatherings. If it is not yet safe to gather in-person, we should not be encouraging in-person gatherings.

54. Regarding p. 7, “Expectations for good-faith compliance” I know the statement in this particular document is related to COVID-19 but are there other implications for any other potential areas of liability?

The statement references congregations who are not willing to collaborate with mission center or field leadership regarding the question of when to begin in-person gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not a blanket statement inclusive of other situations or circumstances.

55. Regarding p.7 “Expectations for good faith compliance,” does the pastor, leadership team, and congregational members need to sign a document acknowledging this liability?

Members, pastors, and leadership team members are not required to sign documents acknowledging this liability.

56. Regarding p. 7, “Expectations for good faith compliance” states if there is a lawsuit where “legal fees and final settlement amounts approved” exceeds the insurance coverage then the congregation is liable. Since all assets are owned by World Church does this mean each member would be personally liable for their portion of the “balance due”?

No. Leaders and members are not personally responsible for amounts exceeding insurance coverages. Any amounts not covered by or in excess of insurance policy limits would be covered by assets held in trust for the congregation, such as AIP funds, local bank accounts, real property, or other tangible assets.

57. My interpretation of the guidelines suggests to me that if local governments are doing something not in harmony with CDC guidelines (3-week decline) then I should use the more restrictive guideline. Is this correct?

You are correct in applying the guidelines. When comparing to local government guidelines, we are to apply whichever is more restrictive.

58. If a congregation has been approved to reopen, but cases increase/ICU space decreases do congregations have to pause again? Do they have to re-apply to re-open, and do MCP's have the authority and responsibility to ensure the congregation stops meeting?
Congregation and mission center leaders are responsible for continued monitoring of local and state COVID-19 data. A congregation must be closed again when the data suggests there is a change in risk to members and community which warrants that action and is done in consultation with the mission center president and field apostle. Reopening a congregation after re-closing is done in consultation with the mission center president and field apostle and the original proposal to reopen can be subsequently applied.

59. What about visitors that come to a congregation; do we turn them away at the door if they are from outside of the county that members live?

The guidelines call for signs to be posted, masks available for those who do not have one, and a list of who is attending each gathering. Guests can be welcomed with these provisions in place. Take note of the county of residence, and after the gathering check on the current data for that county. If the new case number is higher than allowed, contact the attendee and let them know what our guidelines are. Invite the attendee to available zoom gatherings and follow up to let them know as soon as their county is in the yellow.

60. Can a person travel within the state to another congregation?

What is the data in their county? What does the data look like in the state? Is it a drive with no stops to another congregation or is there risk of exposure in route? Think it through, check the guidelines, and consider if going will increase the risk for the congregation you are traveling to before deciding.

61. What if someone travels in from a different state? Do we ask if they have quarantined?

What are the state guidelines for interstate travel and is a quarantine required? What is the data in the state they are coming from? In general, during COVID it is advisable to observe a 14-day quarantine when traveling across state lines. There is a difference between families traveling back and forth for direct visits as a "bubble" or "pod," and attending a gathering which may represent several different households.

62. For campgrounds to open the new infection rate in the county or counties served by the campground must be below 10 per 100,000 population on a seven-day moving average. What is the meaning of "county or counties served?"

"County or counties served" means both the county where the campground is located and the counties where campers are coming from for the event.