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Covid-19 Guidance for Reopening Churches

As stay at home orders begin to relax, conversations are emerging about when and how to reopen our congregations for in person meetings and worship services. The Presbytery of the Miami Valley offers the following ecclesiastical counsel to sessions and pastoral leaders. This counsel is not a directive and is best utilized in conjunction with local, state, and national public orders.

Basic Principles

When and how to reopen a local congregation to in person meetings and worship services is a decision for each church session. There is no “one size fits all” process.

Reopening is a gradual process; it is not an immediate return to what we have known.

Things to Consider

What does it mean to reopen?

- Resumption of in person worship only?
- Resumption of in person worship and Christian education?
- Resumption of committee meetings only?
- Resumption of hands on mission and ministry projects?
- Use of building by outside groups?

The session creates a protocol for reopening.

How will this protocol be communicated and maintained?

Create phases for reopening/start small and build up

- Offices
- In person meetings
- Face to face worship

How will you conduct worship practices such as passing of the peace, children’s sermon, choir/singing, collection of offering, administration of the sacrament, etc.?

Using the 6-foot rule of social distancing what kind of space is needed for an in-person meeting?

Using the 6-foot rule of social distancing how many persons/family units fit in the sanctuary?

How will you cap attendance to maintain the 6-foot rule of social distancing?

What is your congregation’s capacity to clean and sanitize the building after a gathering?

If you offer online worship, will you continue to offer that alongside of in person gatherings?

Will you allow outside groups to resume use of the building?

How will you communicate to these groups the reopening protocol the session created?

Establish a way to be pastorally sensitive to those eager to resume in person meetings and worship as well as those who are afraid to resume in person meetings and worship.

Create a confidential and safe way for individuals who have been in the building to self-report if they contract Covid-19.

If someone has been in the building and contracts Covid-19 how will you communicate this information in a confidential and expedient way to those who were in the building with the individual?

Check with your insurance company to see if they have recommendations or benchmarks for you to follow.

Resources

Presbytery of the Miami Valley webpage contains Covid-19 updates and resources