

**West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod  
COVID-19: Congregational Reopening Checklist  
18 May 2020**

This checklist should be taken as a tool to assist congregational leadership in making a determination with respect to reopening and in instituting local protocols. Given the rapidly changing landscape (in terms of knowledge about the virus and in terms of government response), regular review of those external sources is necessary.

Note well, this document is not to be taken as a recommendation to reopen. Reopening is a congregational decision. Nor should this document be taken as an exhaustive list of things to consider when making a decision on reopening.

Feel free to add spaces after any or all of these questions, filling in that space with information relevant to your congregation. That information can be references to outside resources, explanations of protocols your congregation is putting into place, identification of people responsible, etc.. The first section of this document is the checklist. The second section provides a general introduction followed by more detailed discussion of most of the items on the checklist.

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Checklist last reviewed (by/when): \_\_\_\_\_

Decision Authority

A congregation's governing documents, call documents, and policies outline who makes the decision about reopening. The following should be reviewed.

- Federal, state, county, municipal: Whichever is the most restrictive legally binding order applies to the congregation. Is your congregation allowed to reopen, according to the government, and under what conditions? Who is responsible for tracking the latest government orders?
- Does the letter of call, a standing rule or continuing resolution, a bylaw, or a constitutional provision invest the pastor or some other person(s) or body with authority to cancel worship or close the congregation and under what conditions? If so, who makes the decision?
- If council is the decision making authority with respect to the preceding (i.e., if no one else has the authority to cancel worship or close the congregation), how will the council make the decision? Will it consider the question weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or call special meetings?
- What mechanism will be put in place to review changes in government orders and/or the local situation, and how will the decision making individual or body reconsider being closed/open? Will it review the situation weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or call special meetings? Will automatic triggers be used (e.g., government reimposing limits on public gatherings of a certain number etc.)?

Who's Who?

- Who is checking with your insurer?
- Who is checking with your attorney (or someone in your congregation with legal or risk management expertise)?
- Who is consulting with members in your congregation with medical or public health expertise?
- Who is checking the latest government orders?
- Who is working on the flow of people traffic in and out of the church building and their flow once inside for worship or other activities?
- Who is working on questions related to worship (e.g., singing, peace, communion, worship resources)?
- Who is working on questions related to hygiene (e.g., facility seating and capacity, masks, gloves, cleaning of restrooms and public areas)?
- Who is working on questions related to contact tracing?
- Who communicates with the congregation?

Insurer

- Does your insurance policy cover your congregation adequately for reopening and under what conditions?
- How can your congregation meet those conditions if any?
- Are the conditions, if any, too difficult to satisfy?

#### Legal

- Does your attorney think there are any risks to reopening (other than those risks we face on a regular basis)?
- How might the congregation mitigate those risks if any?
- Are the risks, if any, acceptable?

#### Medical

- Who are the medical/public health in your congregation?
- Have the medical/public health people in your congregation reviewed current CDC, state health department, county health department, and local health department guidelines?
- Do the medical/public health people in your congregation have general advice about closing/reopening?
- Do the medical/public health people in your congregation have specific advice regarding worship, flow of people, hygiene, etc.?

#### Attendance

- What is the seating capacity of your space given prevailing recommendations on social distancing?
- Have you surveyed your congregation or made an educated assessment of likely attendance?
- Can your capacity handle the expected attendance (if unregulated)?
- If not, how will you regulate attendance so as not to exceed capacity?
  - Will you assign services/events to parishioners?
  - Will you make your services/events ticketed events?
  - Will you leave a certain number of slots open for unexpected visitors?
- How will social distancing seating be maintained?
  - Will pews be roped off?
  - Will ushers seat people?
  - Will people have the choice of where they sit?
- Will masks be required of attendees?
  - If someone does not have a mask, will one be provided?
  - If someone refuses to wear a mask, will they be turned away or ejected?
  - If so, by whom and how?
- Who will monitor and regulate attendance and how?
- Will that person have authority to turn away people once the space has reached capacity? And how will they do that?
- Will screening be employed with respect to people who are ill or have been in contact with people who are ill?
  - If so, who will perform the screening?
  - Who will have the authority to turn someone away and how?
- Will nursery be kept closed for the time being?
- For purposes of contact tracing, who will take attendance and how?

#### Hygiene

- Exclusionary Criteria
  - Will those who are ill (or who have been exposed to those who are ill) be told not to attend and how?
  - Will those classed as vulnerable (or who care for the vulnerable) be told not to attend and how?
- Personal Hygiene
  - Will attendees be told that masks are required and how?
  - Will attendees be told that gloves are required and how?
  - Will attendees be told that hand washing and/or sanitizing is required and how?
  - What provisions for hand washing and/or sanitizing will your congregation make?
- Corporate Hygiene
  - How will members be told to refrain from shaking hands, hugging, etc.?

- How will members be told to maintain social distance in seating and movement throughout church building before/during/after worship/event?
- Institutional Hygiene
  - Will restrooms be open or closed?
    - If open, what cleaning protocols will be used?
  - Will signage, if any, be placed in or outside restrooms instructing users on hand washing/sanitizing?
  - Will water fountains and dispensers be blocked from usage?
  - Will kitchens be blocked from usage?
  - What cleaning protocols will be used for high traffic areas and high contact surfaces?
  - If your church has an elevator, if not temporarily closed, how will its use be regulated and how will it be cleaned?
  - If nurseries are reopened, what hygiene and cleaning protocols will be used?
  - If there is more than one service/event within a five-day time span, will the space be cleaned and how?

### Worship

- Synod advice on worship has been reviewed.
- Should the pastor lead worship, or should the pastor continue to shelter in place?
- How will ushers/greeters etc. be retrained for worship under the current conditions?
- How will cleaning personnel be retrained for the current conditions?
- How will counters be retrained for the current conditions?
- Will a shorter worship format be used?
- Will singing be eliminated for the time being?
- Will the physical exchange of the peace be eliminated?
- Will the passing of the offering plate be replaced with an offering box/plate(s) be placed in the narthex or some other place?
- How will furnishings and other items be rearranged or removed to reduce potential for cross-contamination?
  - If there are services within a five-day time span, will worship resources (e.g., hymnals) be removed and replaced with bulletins or projection?
  - If there are services within a five-day time span, what cleaning protocols will be used?
  - Will the baptismal font be removed or emptied of water?
- Will hospitality (e.g., coffee and snacks) be suspended?
- If communion is being offered...
  - What hygiene protocols will be employed in the preparation, service, and cleaning up of communion?
  - How will the altar guild and the Eucharistic administrators be trained for these protocols?
  - Will wafers be used?
    - How will the bread be distributed?
  - Will communion be offered in one kind?
  - How will the wine be distributed?
    - Will individual glasses be used?
  - Will kneeling be eliminated?
  - How will appropriate distancing be maintained as people come to and from the place of distribution?
- For those who cannot attend (or will not attend) because of COVID-19, how will the congregation [continue] to minister to them?

### Church Meetings Other than Worship

- Synod advice on meetings other than worship has been reviewed.
- Will an usher/greeter be assigned to this event/activity?
- What cleaning protocol will be used in connection with this event/activity?

### Use of Facility by Outside Groups

- Synod advice on meetings other than worship has been reviewed.
- Will an usher/greeter be assigned to this event/activity?
- What cleaning protocol will be used in connection with this event/activity?