

# **Working Group on in-person gatherings**

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## **Report to Presbytery**

**June 15, 2020**

## Introduction

This document is to provide guidance for Churches to consider prior to reopening for worship services.

The report does not provide guidance in the areas of pastoral care (funerals, weddings, visits); church activities such as committee meetings, Session meetings, social groups; or rentals – both short and long term.

This document was prepared as guidance for the first step only.

## Guiding Principles

- ▶ The primary aim is the establishment of a safe environment for attending Church worship services free from transmission of the COVID-19.
- ▶ Sessions have the responsibility for the decision to reopen their church building for services and other related activities.
- ▶ This document was based on the most current information provided by the Ontario Government and Public Health Authorities. It is only current as of the date of issue as recommendations from health authorities are expected to change according to events.
- ▶ See Appendix “A” for a list of references and web links, and Appendix “B” for church reopening requirement by provinces.

## Reopening for Worship Requirements

The following is a list of tasks to be organized before the service:

- ▶ Ontario Provincial guidelines set people usage at 30% of church capacity; ensure the square footage of the sanctuary would allow physical distancing. Consider if you need to have members pre-register their attendance at church.
- ▶ Deep cleaning of the Church where the congregation will enter and exit, attend worship, the designated washrooms, stairs and elevators.
- ▶ Prepare signage to clearly indicate entrance and exit, which should ideally be different.
- ▶ Prepare signage to indicate the washrooms that should be used and instructions on how to clean them after each use.
- ▶ Signage indicating areas that are off limits such as kitchens.
- ▶ Deep cleaning of the sanctuary and removal of Bibles, hymn books, pew cushions, etc.
- ▶ Planned social distancing in the sanctuary. Determine whether or not you need to cordon off pews.
- ▶ Determine the handing of the offering plates to ensure minimal contact

- ▶ Choir should not be singing without masks. Consider instrumental soloists.
- ▶ Have the necessary hand sanitizers located at entrances and exits and in the washrooms and other required locations. Plus, masks for those who do not have them.
- ▶ Decide how the Minister(s) will perform the service with social distancing.
- ▶ Train ushers on the procedures for the service.
- ▶ Determine how best to communicate to the congregation about the practices and requirements for the Sunday service. Also remind them that if they are not feeling well to not attend church.
- ▶ If you host multiple services, consider if there is enough time to clean the sanctuary between services.
- ▶ Decide if you want to maintain an attendance log in case of contact tracing – also determine how long you need to maintain this information.
- ▶ Have a person take photographs of the preparations and the service as this will be a historic event that should be recorded and celebrated.

## **Service Requirements**

The following are tasks during the service:

- ▶ The entrance and exits and sanctuary have ushers who are masked. Pre-determine if you need to have a staggered entry and exit.
- ▶ Have someone prepared to wipe down handrails, door handles, elevator, and other commonly touched items.
- ▶ Have hand sanitizing station at the designated entrance and exit.
- ▶ The church bulletin is available in a method that respects social distancing (e.g. PowerPoint only or e-mailed in advance).
- ▶ If raining, a place for umbrella and coats that respects social distancing.
- ▶ People are in the pews that respects social distancing.
- ▶ Offering is collected in way that respects social distancing [recommended that those handling offerings wear gloves].
- ▶ Music is provided that respects social distancing. Consider discouraging congregational singing.
- ▶ Microphones should not be shared.
- ▶ Choir may not be able to sing due to social distancing and cannot gather before and after the service except under the requirements of social distancing.
- ▶ Organist may be able to play if they can respect social distancing.
- ▶ The Minister conducts the service in a way that respects social distancing.
- ▶ The children's time must respect social distancing.
- ▶ After church coffee is not feasible. No refreshments or food of any type.
- ▶ Sunday School may not be available, and if it is, it must respect social distancing.

## **Post-service Requirements**

The following are tasks after the service:

- ▶ Perform a deep cleaning of all areas used by members of the congregation.
- ▶ Clean microphones after each use [See Appendix A: References and web links].
- ▶ Determine procedure for counters so that physical distancing is maintained.
- ▶ Takedown of external signage, if posted.
- ▶ Debrief with those who had tasks during the service for a post action report to Session.

## **The Church Office**

The following are tasks required for the opening of the Church Office:

- ▶ Decision on who needs to be in the office and when.
- ▶ Decide whether visitors in the office would be allowed or not. If allowed, a procedure for visitors will have to be developed that respects social distancing.
- ▶ Consider installing a plexiglass barrier in the office where deemed necessary.
- ▶ Internal procedures for the Church Office staff and the Minister will be required that respects social distancing as well as for the Church custodian.
- ▶ Limit access to the church building by one entry and one exit.
- ▶ Signage and instructions for entering and leaving the building will have to be posted.
- ▶ The Church Custodian will require instructions on the proper cleaning and disinfection of the Church and other areas impacted on its operations.
- ▶ Hand sanitizers and other cleaning wipes station will be required by the entrance to the Church Office.

## **APPENDIX A: References and web links**

1. Presbyterian Church in Canada: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information & Resources for Churches - [\[Link to reference\]](#)
2. Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) - COVID 19 Updates- [\[Link to reference\]](#)
3. Public Health Ontario (PHO) - COVID 19 Updates- [\[Link to reference\]](#)
4. Ottawa Public Health (OPH) - COVID 19 Updates- [\[Link to reference\]](#)
5. Clear microphones after each use- [\[Link to reference\]](#)

## APPENDIX B: Church Reopening Requirements by Provinces

| Province | Date    | Restrictions   | Notes/Comments  |
|----------|---------|--|---|
| BC       | May 19  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ maximum 50 persons indoors or outdoors;</li> <li>→ physical distancing in place;</li> <li>→ outdoor limit 50 vehicles</li> </ul>  | Most places of worship waited a minimum of two weeks. Many are looking at outdoor summer services and then waiting until the fall for "full" indoor services.   |
| AB       | June 7  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ worship and faith-based activities;</li> <li>→ maximum 50 ppl or 1/3 of normal attendance, whichever is smaller;</li> <li>→ physical distancing in place, including passing in hallways;</li> <li>→ discourage congregational singing and after service snacks</li> </ul> | Most congregations are opting to delay opening<br>Note: on June 9 Alberta modified some restrictions – "As long as public health measures and physical distancing are in place, there will no longer be caps on the number of people who can attend worship gatherings.." <a href="#">[Link to reference]</a> |
| SK       | June 8  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ 1/3 of the defined occupancy rate of the facility to a maximum of 30 individuals;</li> <li>→ physical distancing between individual households;</li> <li>→ singing not recommended;</li> <li>→ food and beverage service suspended</li> </ul>                             | Many are taking a wait-and-see approach. Small churches are more likely to open.<br>Note: churches in Saskatchewan were never closed but limited to 10 persons. <a href="#">[Link to reference]</a>   |
| MB       | May 30  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ maximum of 25 with physical distancing</li> </ul>   | Many reluctant to open for lack of a plan, concern for health or because the number expected will be low. <a href="#">[Link to reference]</a>   |
| ON       | June 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ 30% of building capacity;</li> <li>→ practice physical distancing;</li> </ul>   | Guidance to be provided to spiritual leaders and their staff (date unknown) <a href="#">[Link to reference]</a>   |
| QC       |         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ for places of worship, religious gatherings of all faiths should be suspended, unless they are essential. If a gathering takes place, physical distancing must be observed.</li> </ul>  |   |
| NB       |         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ outdoor religious services;</li> <li>→ congregation stays in their vehicles and the vehicles are two meters apart;</li> <li>→ subject to Public Health general guidance</li> </ul>  | <a href="#">Link to reference</a>   |
| NS       | May 1   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ drive-in religious services are allowed; no limit but physical distancing in place.</li> </ul>  | <a href="#">Link to reference</a>   |
| PEI      | June 1  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ no more than 15 people indoors and 20 people outdoors, including staff and volunteers;</li> <li>→ physical distancing;</li> </ul>   | <a href="#">Link to reference</a>   |
| NL       | No date | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ places of worship are permitted to resume operations; no details but physical distancing assumed.</li> </ul>  | <a href="#">Link to reference</a>   |