



## Safely returning to worship



Houses of worship play a critical role in the life of the community. As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic progressed, many organizations suspended in-person gatherings in accordance with government mandates or recommendations to limit the spread of the virus.

Now that states and local communities are planning to ease restrictions, you may be considering how and when to resume gathering for services and other activities. Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer)<sup>1</sup> recommends that insureds comply with all state and local laws and ordinances related to COVID-19, take necessary safety precautions to avoid the spread of COVID-19 and follow the CDC guidelines available on our dedicated website.

The following is a high-level overview of safeguards for consideration by houses of worship as they think about re-opening for public services:



# Safely returning to worship

## **Prepare your building**

Walk around the property and inside the buildings to check for any safety hazards or concerns. Clean and disinfect your facility thoroughly before opening. Make sure adequate supplies of hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies and disinfectants are available. Post signs regarding new procedures on social distancing, changes to operations and the importance of handwashing.

## **Continue with online options**

For those who are sick, at higher risk, recently exposed to a COVID-19 patient or who are otherwise uncomfortable gathering in person, continue to offer livestream or other online worship services.

## **Use protective equipment**

All who attend, work or volunteer should wear a face covering or mask per guidance of the CDC. Ushers and greeters who hold or prop open doors should wear gloves. Those who are ill or displaying symptoms should be advised to stay at home. Consider contactless temperature checks.

## **Maintain social distancing**

Arrange worship services to enable six feet of physical separation between persons. This may involve removing or cordoning off seats. Additional smaller and shorter worship services may be required. Provide for an orderly dismissal of the service to enable social distancing. Additional transition time between services may be required.

## **Postpone practices that involve physical contact**

Implement alternatives to shared activities such as distributing bulletins, passing offering baskets, sharing communion elements and passing attendance pads. Consider temporarily discontinuing coffee or refreshment times and shared meals. Think of creative ways to pass the peace or greet each other without touch such as smiling and waving.

## **Enhance cleaning practices**

Once services resume, establish an enhanced cleaning and disinfecting schedule, including cleaning the sanctuary, restrooms and other rooms after each service. Disinfect common and high-traffic areas as well as any items handled by attendees.



# Safely returning to worship

## **Safeguard older adults and those at high risk**

Consider instituting a separate, smaller “senior service” for those age 60 and above or those with underlying medical conditions. Limit their volunteer participation to activities that do not involve physical interaction with others.

## **Protect children, youth and those who work with them**

Consider whether to temporarily postpone nursery programs and Sunday School classes. If you plan to continue to offer such services, consider additional safeguards including social distancing with limited class sizes, temperature/symptom screening of children, modified drop-off and pick-up procedures, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, and protective equipment for staff and volunteers.

## **Communication is key**

Whatever safeguards are chosen, it is vital to communicate procedures to the congregation, volunteers and staff before the date set for re-opening. This can be accomplished through email, social media postings, phone calls and/or automated phone messaging, as well as signs and postings at your facility.

## **Sample COVID-19 Waiver**

*This form is made available solely for your convenience and should not be construed as legal advice. Given the extremely dynamic and rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, please be advised that this form is provided “as is” and without warranty of any kind, either express or implied about its completeness, accuracy, reliability, or suitability. Neither Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. nor any of its affiliates will be liable for any damages or losses arising from the use of this form.*