

May 13, 2020

I have received a number of questions about what the Governor's plan for Phase One means for congregations. I am aware that perspectives and opinions differ about what to do. *I want to clarify what I have heard from Presbytery leadership:*

- We recommend that all congregations continue to exercise caution and remain “safer at home” *for the time being*. This will allow us to see if there is any resurgence in the number of COVID-19 cases in our area when more businesses open up.
- We encourage congregations to continue with virtual worship as they are able, perhaps partnering with a neighbor, experiment with drive-in worship, or worship outdoors with physical distancing, especially as the weather improves.

This period of remaining safer at home will give leaders of congregations the time to plan carefully for re-opening in-person worship services, which will require significant preparation. We have provided several documents with questions to consider before re-opening, which include things from determining how to mark rooms for physical distancing and provide for cleaning, disinfecting, no touch alternatives for passing the peace & taking the offering, providing or requiring masks, and what to do about music when congregational and choral singing is not an option. We are attaching some guidance from the CDC and insurance companies, but you should also check with your own insurance company.

- Church leaders need to give thought to what they will do if someone in the congregation or their pastor contracts the virus. They also need to take into consideration whether and how their pastor and staff can feel safe returning to public worship.
- Presbytery leaders are clear that even when congregations resume face to face public worship that they need to continue worship and other activities in some virtual or other remote means for those who are vulnerable. What we are learning through this crisis is that many congregations are experiencing more participation, more people engaging in regular spiritual practices, and more people watching online than attended worship before. Vital congregational ministry in the present and the future means being the Church for the community around us and for those who may not have discovered us before.

These are strange and challenging times, but one of my favorite quotations comes from a sign at the entrance to a Presbyterian camp in Cuba: “These are difficult times, but they are our times.” Scripture tells us the story of Esther, who in a time of crisis for the Jewish people, was told perhaps she had been called “for such a time as this.” These are our times and God will be with us as God was with Esther and the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us finding ways to worship and serve.

May God bless you all,

Liza

[CDC: Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting](#)

[Brotherhood Mutual - Before we Gather: Building Preparation - Deep Clean and Disinfect](#)

See our [website](#) for additional resources