

Re-opening Best Practices for Local Churches
Eastern PA Conference United Methodist Church
Updated March 2021

The Eastern PA Conference places the health and welfare of our members and the surrounding community as the first priority in making decisions around occupancy. Congregations that reopen must be committed to the goal of resisting spread of the virus by following all state and city guidelines and have a reopening plan approved by their church council. Please continue to monitor both the PA.gov and CDC websites for up-to-date information and guidelines.

Overall Recommendations: General safety rules are still in place.

- Wear masks in public.
- Keep physical distance of six feet or more.
- Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces often.
- Limit group gatherings and crowds.

Worship Recommendations:

- **Capacity:** We recommend following Gov. Wolf's mitigation restrictions regarding capacity. Effective 3/1/2021, maximum occupancy is 15% for indoor events and 20% for outdoor events, regardless of venue size and only if attendees and staff are able to comply with the 6-foot physical distancing requirement.
- **Masks:** Wear face masks while at church, as is recommended in public spaces. Please have masks available for people upon entry if they do not arrive with one. Have a designated leadership team prepared with a strategy to implement these recommendations. Do not let the burden of this implementation fall on the pastor.
- **Social Distance:** Maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person/family unit.
- **Singing:** Social distancing between members of the ensemble and the wider congregation should be followed. Using bells or other instruments is a preferred alternative to singing, especially in high-risk, vulnerable populations.
- **No touch alternatives:** Continue to use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. We recommend screens over bulletins. If you must use bulletins, do not reuse.
- **Cleaning:** Cleaning surfaces and all common areas: [See CDC Guidelines](#).
- **Communion:** Pre-packaged, sanitized communion packets continue to be the best option.
- **Small Groups/Bible study:** Bible studies and small groups can meet in person, following distancing guidelines and wearing masks. We recommend maintaining some online options for high risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in public.
- **Office:** Office functions could resume as normal, with attention to cleaning. Telework is still encouraged, where possible.
- **General Building:**
 - Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
 - Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
 - Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to hightouch surfaces.
 - If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, put your communication plan into action, and cooperate fully with contact tracers.