

Regathering Guidelines from Steering Cabinet

June 2020

The Steering Cabinet of the Presbytery of Baltimore met to discuss congregations regathering as some restrictions put in place during the COVID 19 pandemic are lifted. The Cabinet feels strongly that the protection of the vulnerable is of the highest priority and attempts to regather too soon without proper and strict protocols will endanger the health of leaders and members alike. The virus has not been fully mitigated. As a result, these guidelines are put before the Presbytery - representing our responsibility to encourage, challenge and equip our congregations and worshipping communities during this pandemic uncertain times.

Opening Up America Guidelines

PoB Recommendations for Churches

PHASE I

- ▶ All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place.
- ▶ No more than 10 people should gather and should maintain 6 feet of social distancing.
- ▶ Encourage telework; if possible, return to work in phases.
- ▶ Close common areas where people are likely to congregate and interact.
- ▶ Visits to senior care facilities and hospitals should be prohibited.
- ▶ School and organized youth activities should remain closed.
- ▶ Large venues, including places of worship, can operate under strict social distancing protocols.

- ▶ Churches should continue holding virtual worship services only.
- ▶ Worship leaders should consider resuming recording in their sanctuary while maintaining and modeling at least 6 feet of social distancing.
- ▶ High-risk individuals, including staff, should continue to shelter in place.
- ▶ Small groups, Bible studies, pastoral care, meetings, etc. should continue to function in a virtual format.
- ▶ Weddings and memorial services should be kept to less than 10 in attendance, maintaining social distance guidelines and wearing masks.

PHASE 2

- ▶ All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place.
- ▶ No more than 50 people should gather and should maintain 6 feet of social distancing.
- ▶ Encourage telework if possible. Close common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact.
- ▶ Non-essential travel can resume.
- ▶ Visits to senior care facilities and hospitals should be prohibited.

- ▶ Churches should continue offering virtual worship services.
- ▶ Churches may consider hosting in-person worship for groups of up to 50 people, which may include outdoor worship.
 - ▶ Require social distancing and face masks for all participants.
 - ▶ Use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting and counting offering, etc.
 - ▶ Create a healthy hospitality strategy for ensuring compliance and preparing for sanitation.

Opening Up America Guidelines

PoB Recommendations for Churches

PHASE 2

- ▶ School and organized youth activities can reopen, maintaining social distance guidelines.
- ▶ Large venues, including places of worship, can operate under moderate social distancing protocols.



BaltimorePresbytery.org

Please consult your county's website for additional guidelines.

The shift from Phase Two to Phase Three is significant; we encourage churches to create a contextualized stepwise approach for their congregations.

- ▶ Remove congregational and choral singing from the service because of increased risk of transmission.
- ▶ Give serious consideration to options for Communion and other parts of the worship experience in order to minimize contact. (This might mean postponing in-person communion.)
- ▶ Track attendance and create a plan of action in case one of your worshippers becomes infected with COVID-19 after gathering.
- ▶ Childcare, nursery, and children's church should not be offered.
- ▶ High-risk individuals, including staff, should continue to shelter in place.
- ▶ Clergy and staff may resume working in the church office, maintain social distancing and wearing masks.
- ▶ Small groups, Bible studies, meetings, etc. may begin to meet in-person maintaining social distancing guidelines and wearing masks.
- ▶ Encourage continued virtual pastoral care; any in-person pastoral care visits need to maintain social distancing, wear masks, and if possible, occur outside.
- ▶ Weddings and memorial services should be kept to less than 50 in attendance, maintaining social distance guidelines and wearing masks.

PHASE 3

- ▶ Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should maintain social distancing.
- ▶ Visits to senior care facilities and hospitals can resume.
- ▶ Large venues, including places of worship, can operate under limited social distancing protocols.

- ▶ Churches may worship in-person and may continue virtual opportunities.
- ▶ Participants should wear cloth masks at church and in community ministry.
- ▶ Until there is a breakthrough regarding a vaccine, we encourage churches to model safe and healthy behaviors, using the PoB recommendations in Phase Two.