

*Northern Illinois Conference*  
*Sally Dyck, Bishop*



# ReTurn Team Plan

June 15, 2020 updated with Message from the Bishop

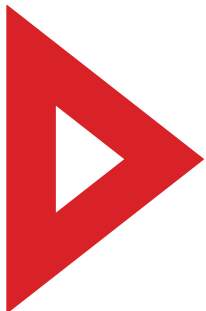
## ReTurn Team Members:

Hope Chernich  
Chan Ik Choi  
Seamus Enright  
Mark Gilmore  
Rob Hamilton  
Grace Imathiu

Lisa Kruse-Safford  
Woo Min Lee  
Pamela Pirtle  
Megan Smick  
Kathy Wellman  
Chris Winkler


## *In consultation with*

The Northern Illinois Conference Cabinet and  
Bishop Sally Dyck



**Northern Illinois Conference**  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH






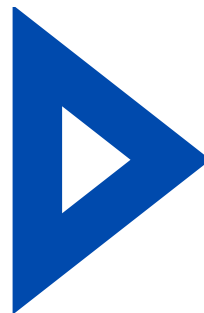
*Added June 15, 2020*

# A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP SALLY DYCK

The ReTurn Team is grateful for the support and feedback received in response to the May 15 guidelines offered for churches to consider as businesses and institutions around us have begun to reopen. We recognize that the Health Teams or Leadership Teams tasked with guiding your work in your local context are feeling an increasing amount of pressure to move toward a return to “normal” in-person activities. As our state has moved into Stage 3 and soon will likely move to Stage 4, we wish to offer additional clarification and guidance that may help you moving forward.

The following are some points we wish to emphasize and clarify:

- The first premise we offer continues to be “Do No Harm.” We understand this to mean that each stage of reopening is tested against the question of what harm can this do, particularly to those whose immune systems may be compromised in any way. This may include congregants, staff, visitors and clergy.
  - We also recognize that each church must consider its own context, location and physical constraints. Each community is affected by the virus in different measures.
  - Church leaders are urged to do the best they can with the information they have to honestly assess the needs, challenges and risks they will realize as they move from one phase to another.
  - The point of the guidelines we offer are not a matter of what state or local authorities will allow or enforce; the point is to keep people safe and not become an outbreak hot spot.
  - We urge church leaders not to think in terms of the church being “closed;” rather, how and when the church will gradually and safely return to “in-person” activities.
  - We recognize that there have been conflicting guidelines and directives issued by federal, state, local and church bodies. We suggest that where there are conflicting directions and suggestions, church leaders utilize the plumb line of “do no harm” as they make decisions.
  - As state restrictions around children’s summer camps have loosened, questions about mission and work trips, camping and VBS are being asked. We urge church leaders to consider whether or not enforcing social distancing is possible when deciding about their own programs.
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## A MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP (CONT.)

- Some congregations have expressed frustration at determining whether the most important criteria is social distancing or the numerical limit or the percentage of capacity. While there is no absolute answer, we urge church leaders to bear in mind that the larger the number of attendees at an event, the greater the potential for transmission of this virus. The guidelines and recommendations are not set forth to keep people from returning to in-person ministry experiences, but to help everyone think about measures that will keep people safer.

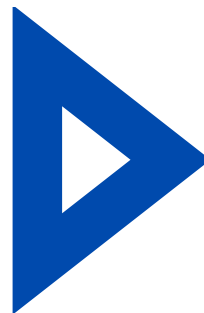
Finally, we recognize that we don't all see the pandemic from the same angle or through the same lens. If they find that divisions are forming in the congregation, church leaders should take care that they work together toward establishing common goals and mutual understanding in order to prevent a different kind of harm in our communities. The best way to do this may be to look at the guidelines from the perspective of "what we can do" rather than "what we cannot do." Examples of "what we can do" include holding office hours in a park; celebrating Communion in groups of 10 or less; and holding prayer meetings or small group meetings in backyards, parks, or church parking lots.

Again I want to thank the ReTurn Team for their diligent work on providing guidelines for local churches to safely begin to return to in-person gatherings and eventually worship. Immediately after they gave us their best work, Governor J.B. Pritzker's office and the Centers for Disease Control provided guidelines for faith communities. However, the ReTurn Team's guidelines were largely in keeping with the state and CDC's.

I still highly urge you to use the ReTurn team's work to guide your conversations and decision-making in your local church. And I know it's not an easy task! One of our pastors said, "When it comes to leading a church through reopening, I feel like a pilot trying to land a plane in a mountainous region during a blinding snowstorm without an instrument panel." It's a constantly moving target for all of us. It's fraught with all kinds of uncertainty.

But we can do this! In fact, the lives of those you love are depending upon you to do this as carefully as you can! This is how we love our neighbor, our elderly parent, pastor or friend with underlying medical conditions—or anyone else! The life you save may be your own! Be safe!

Bishop Sally Dyck



# INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, activities that have been an essential part of what the Church is and how the Church operates suddenly possess the real possibility of contributing to the spread of the virus. In such times of crisis, people of faith look to the church for comfort and guidance and to be a beacon of hope and new life in the face of difficulty and despair.

Thus, in cooperation with and at the direction of church and government authorities, the Northern Illinois Conference ReTurn Team was assembled to investigate and recommend protocols the Church must follow to mitigate the number of people infected.

This document is intended to provide best practices into a series of phases by which local churches can assess their current situation. After a thorough evaluation, the local church can determine the best path forward or, if necessary, revert to a previous level.

One of the first things each church can do is to form a Health Team or designate a group that will be responsible to make decisions and implement specific return plans for each congregation. The ReTurn Team advises all churches to complete each step and resist shortcuts. The ReTurn Team also encourages each church's pastor and lay leadership covenant to resist social, economic and cultural pressures to reopen the church too soon and put lives at risk.

The following guidelines and plans must be applied contextually with discernment. What may be safe for one church may not be safe for another. Churches will move through these phases at different paces in accordance with their local health officials and their members' self-reported exposure to COVID-19.

## INTRODUCTION (CONT.)

In addition, as we evaluate available information, we also issue the caution that in-person church-related activities may well be one of the last pieces of social interaction to be fully reinstated. The Church must face hard realities about many of our churches, including:

- An aging population that has an elevated risk of infection;
- Lack of physical space to allow for proper social distancing
- Lack of resources to properly prepare worship, meeting and administrative space between gatherings.

The financial cost of meeting requirements for cleaning, sanitizing, and personal protection to reinstate in-person ministry in each phase should be considered. As a result, we urge the expansion of remote discipleship, online worship, online giving, and virtual ministry as part of a long-term discipleship strategy.

Finally, it is our prayer that the Church views this current challenge through the eyes of faith. As United Methodists, the First General Rule (Do No Harm) should be the primary consideration for any activity. We encourage theological reflection and commend the metaphors that bring us closer to the story of the wilderness journey of the Hebrew people in Exodus where they were formed into a new people; the story of the flood that devastated the earth and how Noah had to patiently read the signs before opening the doors to the ark and allowing the creatures in his care to exit and re-inhabit the earth; as well as other examples of God's people enduring hardship and trial. We turn to the stories of our faith to see how God moves us from orientation to disorientation to reorientation as part of God's creating work that began in a garden with two persons and ends with worship with the great cloud of witnesses.

ReTurn Team and the NIC Cabinet

# PLAN STRUCTURE

The NIC ReTurn Team Plan is organized according to the five phases of "Restore Illinois," Governor JB Pritzker's public health approach to safely reopen the state of Illinois. [Click here to view the full plan](#) or visit [coronavirus.il.gov](https://coronavirus.il.gov).

NIC encompasses all or part of the North Central and Northeast Restore Illinois health regions numbered.

Considerations, absolute guidelines based on CDC and IDPH restrictions, and best practices are presented for each phase and may carry over from phase to phase.

## Phase 1 - Rapid Spread

*Every region has experienced this phase once already and could return to it if mitigation efforts are unsuccessful.*

## Phase 2 - Flattening

## Phase 3 - Recovery

## Phase 4 - Revitalization

## Phase 5 - Restoration

# CATEGORIES OF CONCERN

Ten specific areas of concern need to be addressed by all congregations as they move through each phase:

**psychological impacts** - manage expectations, prepare for future

**building preparations** - evaluate space, cleaning procedures, supplies, capacity, and signage

**worship** - weekly worship plans, offering

**vulnerable populations** - accommodations for online worship

**spiritual formation/small groups** - children's ministry, youth ministry, VBS, Bible study

**administration** - staff, office hours, committee meetings, rehearsals

**ministries** - church ministries, vital ministries (space sharers)

**pastoral care** - home visitations, institutional visits, lay visitation

**special events** - community events, fundraisers, dinner, potlucks, funerals, weddings, rentals

**outreach** - home groups/meetings, reaching new people, maintaining new online connections

# PHASE 1

*Strict stay-at-home and social distancing guidelines in place and only essential business remain open.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Psychological impacts

#### Helping your congregation cope

### Building preparations

Is the church building/property secure? What are custodial arrangements for cleaning? Have cleaning supplies, PPE, hand sanitizer been ordered for reopening? Are signs posted around the building? Have voicemail, websites, and social media been updated?

### Worship

Offered online? Prerecorded or live? Who needs help with access? Is there an online giving platform in place? Is the church communicating with regular givers?

### Vulnerable populations

Can the church help people use new technologies? Does the online service video have subtitles or closed captioning? Can the church email a transcript ahead of time?

## ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

- Form a Health Team or designate a group authorized to monitor ongoing situations and develop, implement, and monitor guidelines
- Inspect building weekly
- No groups in the building
- Entry to building limited to essential personnel; record and track access
- Post information about how to reach the pastor and church office, and how people can worship virtually
- Weekly worship is cancelled or moved online
- Provide options for congregation to keep giving and communicate them clearly
- Be in regular communications with vulnerable congregants
- Make accommodations for online worship with closed captions and published transcripts
- No in-person meetings, youth or children's ministries, mission trips or VBS
- Staff work from home and meet virtually
- No in-person pastoral visits
- No gatherings, events, space rentals, weddings, or in-person group meetings



# PHASE 1

## CONSIDERATIONS (cont.)

### Spiritual formation

How are children and youth included in online worship? What virtual outlets can be used for Bible studies?

### Administration

How can staff continue their work?

### Ministries

Can the church continue to share space with vital ministries and will they follow protocols? Who is responsible for cleaning after use and the supplies needed?

### Pastoral care

How is the pastor staying in touch?

### Special events

How is the church communicating postponement and cancellation of special events?

### Outreach

How does the church connect with people who need spiritual reassurance or who are interested in church membership?

## BEST PRACTICES

- Close building to all gatherings and groups & communicate closure
- Monitor building access
- Restock PPE & cleaning materials for opening
- Include Trustees in Health Team conversations and planning
- Explore Zoom, livestreaming, YouTube and Facebook watch parties to find best platform
- Monitor giving and thank givers personally
- Offer technical support for giving apps and websites
- Allow multiple giving formats
- Consider range of technology expertise in your congregation; offer support
- Keep in touch via phone & online meetings
- Move studies & prayer groups to video chat or conference calls
- Send devotions or publish online
- Communicate with families to determine what support is needed
- Offer story times, children's sermons and music times via video
- Move youth ministry online and include youth in worship and planning
- Move VBS experience online
- Develop clear policies for staff work expectations and compensation while teleworking
- Communicate expectations promptly and clearly with space sharers
- Communicate regularly with congregation via phone, cards, emails, etc.
- Postpone all physical gatherings
- Identify new connections gained by virtual worship and reach out via direct message, Zoom, Google Hangout, Amplify, etc.



## MOVING BEYOND PHASE 1

Tailor the application of these criteria to local circumstances (e.g., assess the highest numbers in the counties that the church serves, attending to the exposure of that particular community).

Identify critical local officials and establish direct lines of communication. Leaders should understand their region's satisfaction of criteria and the congregation's ability to follow the recommendations.

Move back to more stringent restrictions if infection numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to the congregation.

See this as a discernment process: even as other regions or churches open, one's local context is most important. Although some things may be permitted, that does not always mean that they are beneficial.

Share your plan to move to the next phase with your District Superintendent.

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Does the church have a group of people (Health Team) designated to monitor the situation and develop guidelines for the congregation?
- Are leaders prepared to continue ministry at home?
- What technologies and virtual platforms work best for the congregation?
- What should leaders be doing/getting done now to prepare for the next phase?



## PHASE 2

*Vulnerable individuals continue to stay at home, physical distancing guidelines must be followed, non-essential travel and meetings are discouraged.*

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Psychological impacts

##### Helping your congregation cope

#### Building preparations

How will the church track people entering the building and collect their information? How will you limit access to sick individuals? What happens if someone in the building gets sick? What areas are off limits? Have staff been trained regarding new policies and procedures? What is the capacity for each room while observing social distancing (use social distancing space calculator)? How will people move throughout the building?

#### Worship

How is the church sharing info about worship with congregation/community? Have staff and lay leaders discerned the practice of online communion? How will the church ensure access? How will the church provide time for online or virtual fellowship? What does the congregation think about virtual worship and returning to in-person worship?

## ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

- Create a process for anyone who enters the building(s)
- Develop policy for space use (what spaces and when)
- Maintain inventory of PPE & supplies
- Conduct a walk-through with Health Team to identify any policy difficulties
- No groups in the building
- No in-person worship
- Continue online faith formation
- Communicate new space use protocols with vital ministry/space sharing partners
- Funerals can be held with a limit of 10 persons in attendance and adhering to social distancing, PPE usage, and cleaning/sanitizing protocols
- Staff work from home and meet virtually
- No in-person pastoral visits
- No gatherings, events, space rentals, weddings, in-person group meetings





## PHASE 2

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### **Vulnerable populations**

Is closed captioning or subtitles available for online service? Are written materials emailed ahead of time?

#### **Spiritual formation**

How are the church's online programs (Bible studies, etc.) doing?


#### **Administration**

Do staff have adequate resources to continue working from home? Have "virtual ministry" tasks been added to their job description? What will hours and expectations be once the office reopens? Do work spaces/offices need reworking in light of physical distancing guidelines? What are committee priorities and what can be postponed?

#### **Outreach**

How is the church following up with people who want to join? How is the church connecting with each other and the community?

## BEST PRACTICES

- Health Team should create an FAQ sheet for all people entering the building and space sharers about what to expect when the building reopens
  - Create staggered building usage schedule
  - Post expectations about face masks and hand washing
  - Set up hand sanitizer stations at entrances and throughout building
  - Designate a place for individuals to be isolated if they become sick while in the building
  - Determine if church can purchase hands-free faucets, soap dispensers, hand dryers
  - Increase ventilation where possible
  - Continue to offer virtual worship and fellowship opportunities
  - Develop teams/processes to maintain connections
  - Clearly define any new staff work responsibilities
  - Use surveys or social medial polls to get congregational feedback regarding online and in-person worship
  - Continue online or virtual outreach
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## MOVING BEYOND PHASE 2

You will need to identify who is responsible to implement your context-specific guidelines, paying special attention to what is happening in the regions where the church operations and within the specific congregations (this can be considered the "Health Team").

If numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to the congregation, leaders may need to move back to more stringent restrictions. Congregations and church leaders should see this as a discernment process.

Even as other regions or churches open, one's local context is most important. Although some things may be permitted, that does not always mean that they are beneficial.

Share plans to move to the next phase with the District Superintendent.

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Who is responsible for managing our context-specific guidelines? (Does the church have a Health Team in place?)
- Has anyone visiting the facility or known to have been in contact with the church community tested positive for COVID-19 in the last two weeks?
- Can the church track who is in the building? Can the building be kept sanitized?

## PHASE 3

*Vulnerable individuals continue to shelter in place. Gatherings <10 people allowed. Face coverings and social distancing are the norm. Travel and meetings may resume with special accommodations to ensure the health and safety for the vulnerable. Schools and daycares may reopen. Visits to senior living facilities and hospitals are prohibited. Manufacturing, offices, retail, barbershops and salons can reopen to the public with capacity limits and safety precautions. Telework is encouraged.*

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Psychological impacts

##### [Helping your congregation cope](#)

#### Building preparations

How long will it take to move larger numbers of people from space to space? What procedures are in place for post-use sanitizing? How are directions given for traffic flow and limits?

#### Worship

Can worship be recorded or streamed from the sanctuary with a small number of people gathered? Is online communion appropriate for the congregation? Could elements be blessed and distributed? How will elements be prepared and distributed?

## ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

- Masks for everyone 2 years and older
- Track everyone entering the building
- Stagger use of spaces and clean them after use
- Post room occupancies adjusted for 6 ft distancing
- Continue livestreaming and virtual worship to accommodate vulnerable populations and those uncomfortable with in-person worship
- Staff can return to work on a limited and staggered schedule
- Committees should work and meet virtually as much as possible
- Community events, fundraisers, dinners/potlucks, and space rentals remain on hold
- Weddings and funerals can take place with a 10-person limit and follow IDPH guidelines

## PHASE 3

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### **Vulnerable populations**

Are online worship and ministries accessible?  
Is there a budget to improve accessibility?

#### **Spiritual formation**

What is the plan for Children's Ministry spaces to be sanitized and disinfected in real time? Will 2020 graduates be invited to return for 2021's mission trip? If groups and ministries meet outdoors, is your space large enough for social distancing?

#### **Outreach**

Who has been "tuning in" to online worship who is new to the church? How should the church reach out? How is the church connecting with the community?

## BEST PRACTICES

- Minimize numbers of people gathering and time together
- Limit handling of microphones and equipment
- Face shields for all speakers
- Limit office hours and access to office
- Gather in spaces with open airflow, propping open doors
- Continue to emphasize online giving
- Encourage online participation among vulnerable populations
- Create an online VBS experience for families to participate in at home
- Organize lay people to make weekly phone calls and to provide digital companionship when possible

## MOVING BEYOND PHASE 3

Health Team continues to monitor the regional, local and congregational context. If numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to the congregation, leaders may need to move back to previous phase.

Continue to discern the needs and capacity of each particular church rather than following the lead of other congregations.

Use patience and wisdom, prioritizing the health and safety of the congregation, staff and community. Although some things may be permitted, that does not always mean that they are beneficial.

Share plans to move to the next phase with the District Superintendent.

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Has anyone visiting the facility or known to have been in contact with the church community tested positive for COVID-19 in the last two weeks?
- Can the building be kept sanitized?



## PHASE 4

*Gatherings of up to 50 people are allowed. Accommodations should be in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable individuals. Face coverings and social distancing are the norm and time in crowded environments should be minimized. Restaurants and bars reopen, travel resumes, childcare and schools reopen under IDPH guidance. Visits to senior living facilities and hospitals are still prohibited.*

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Psychological impacts

##### [Helping your congregation cope](#)

#### Building preparations

Is there enough PPE and cleaning supplies to match increased building use? Who disinfects in between use? Have you developed a restroom policy? Have offices and workspaces been prepared?

#### Worship

How will parking be handled? How will the church ensure that no more than 50 people gather? How many people can the sanctuary accommodate with physical distancing? Will online worship continue? How will you communicate expectations regarding physical distancing and "no touch" greetings? Will you remove "high-touch" items from the pews (Bibles, pencils, etc.)? Will the church provide masks if people don't have them? How will you address sacraments such as Communion or Baptism? How will you handle fellowship? Have you developed protocols for the nursery? Have you developed a procedure for collecting the offering?

#### Vulnerable populations

Will wheelchair users be able to sit with their families and caregivers during worship? What is the strategy for cleaning & disinfecting assisted listening devices?

## ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

- Communicate expectations, protocols, and/or cancellations clearly and frequently
- Consider shortened, multiple services and develop a reservation system and protocols so that attendance will not exceed 50 people
- No one who is sick should enter the building
- Masks are required
- No shared food or drink
- No nursery
- No congregational singing
- No bulletins or hymnals
- No passing of the offering plate
- Manage maximum occupancy in each space and disinfect between use
- Clearly post all rules and guidelines for moving about the building
- Designate one entrance and exit, each with sanitizer available
- Have extra masks on hand
- Keep online service option
- Develop Communion procedure that departs from intinction
- Postpone Baptisms
- Continue online or virtual worship
- Staff can return to work if physical distancing is ensured
- Limit weddings to <50 persons and observe PPE guidelines, physical distancing, worship guidelines
- Maintain online connections







## PHASE 4

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Spiritual Formation

Are there enough PPE and cleaning supplies to match increased building use? Who disinfects in between use? What is the square footage of spaces used for Bible study and Children's Youth Ministry and how many people can it fit with proper social distancing? Will there be an extra supply of masks for people who forget? What is the procedure for moving people from point A to point B? What is the restroom policy of your church at this time? Are volunteers comfortable returning or will new ones need to be recruited and trained? Is there training for teachers and helpers on new sanitation protocols? How will check in/ check out procedures be handled? Can you conduct meetings outdoors? Is there a wellness policy?

#### Administration

Have offices and work spaces been prepared? How will parking be handled? What will the new hours and expectations be when your offices reopen? Can committees continue to meet in person?

## BEST PRACTICES

- Set a restroom policy of one person at a time
- Develop a wellness policy
- Open windows and prop doors when possible
- The smaller the space, the less time spent in the space
- Ensure 24 hours between each group's use of the building
- Direct people to park cars 6 ft apart and stagger entrance to building
- Consider worshipping outside
- Preacher, worship leaders, soloists and readers must wear masks
- Consider having a service reserved for older or at-risk individuals
- Stagger services on different days or in different rooms to allow cleaning and allow 24 hours before a space is used again
- Develop new traditions for your community regarding no-touch greetings
- Consider offering communion to small groups or at alternate times and extend the table to others
- No nursery care
- If projecting the service is not an option, printed bulletins must be taken home with worshippers and disposed
- Designate a safe place to leave offering
- Designate budget, staff and volunteers to strengthen virtual ministry





## PHASE 4

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Ministries

Can ministries operate under social distancing guidelines? Will there be any harm caused if ministries resume? What harm will be caused if ministries do not resume? Can space sharers follow all city, county, state, NIC-UMC building use protocols? Who will be responsible for cleaning/sanitizing after each space sharer building/room(s) use? Who is responsible for purchasing all cleaning supplies?

#### Special Events

Does the need to gather exceed the risk for becoming a "spreading event"?

#### Outreach

What online network or platform is available to reach out and maintain connections with visitors and the community?

## BEST PRACTICES

### (continued)

- Continue offering online classes and studies
- In-person VBS is discouraged but the rate of infection in the community may allow one day/week VBS
- Offer online VBS alternatives and clearly communicate registration, cost, and access
- Communicate VBS plans to the community
- Discourage backyard family groups
- Post any new building use guidelines
- Continue virtual group and staff meetings
- Work with ministry leaders to determine comfort with new health guidelines and the church's policies
- Work with Trustees to monitor building use and cleaning policies
- Pastoral and Lay in-person visits discouraged; find ways to communicate regularly via phone, cards, text, etc.
- Continue online outreach and community connections



## MOVING BEYOND PHASE 4

Moving to public gatherings requires much consideration and planning and should be determined location by location. The realities of the specific region and local context may lead each church to make different decisions about when to gather. Consider the safety and needs of the most vulnerable in your community.

Be creative in thinking about the purpose and goal of worship and faith formation and how to modify your ministries and programs to meet the challenges of this new reality.

If you haven't already, consider surveying the congregation about their thoughts and concerns as you return to public gathering. People may struggle with the guidelines and restrictions, so delaying in-person worship until Phase 5 may be the best option.

It may be appropriate for churches to remain closed even as other stores, businesses, restaurants, and organizations begin to open.

Share plans to move to the next phase with the District Superintendent.

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- How will the church limit gatherings to no more than 50 people?
- Will any harm be caused if ministries resume? What harm will be caused if ministries do not resume?
- Have any cases of COVID-19 been identified linked to the facility or in contact with the church community in the last two weeks?
- Can the building be kept sanitized?

## PHASE 5

*Testing, tracing and treatment are widely available throughout the state. Either a vaccine is developed to prevent additional spread of COVID-19, a treatment option is readily available that ensures health care capacity is no longer a concern, or there are no new cases over a sustained period. Public health experts focus on building out the public health infrastructure needed to meet and overcome future challenges. Healthcare equity is made a priority to improve health outcomes and ensure vulnerable communities receive the quality care they deserve. Large gatherings of all sizes can resume. All sectors of the economy reopen with new health and hygiene practices permanently in place. Sick people advised to stay home.*

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Psychological impacts

##### Helping your congregation cope

#### Building preparations

What changes should be maintained, what can/should return to pre-pandemic norms, and why? Is this the building that we should have, given the way the Church has changed? Are you continuing ongoing assessment of building use by at-risk members?

#### Worship

Can people be made comfortable choosing whether to shake hands or not without stigmatization either way? What new ways of celebrating the sacraments are most appropriate? How are new norms being incorporated into the preparation and administration of the sacraments? Can new hygiene expectations be incorporated into the congregation's practices? Can cleaning be done in real-time? Is there a wellness policy enforced? Are volunteers trained in hygiene best practices? Is there a clear policy for those who are sick? Does the church take temperatures of children and staff or volunteers? If a vaccination becomes available, would the church require proof of vaccination for participants, volunteers or staff? Can the church safely sing together without causing harm? Do folks bring their own bulletins and hymnals?

## ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

- Regular liability/risk reviews are encouraged
- Develop a new emergency plan to include pandemic response
- Sanitizer placed at all entrances
- Keep online service as an option
- Consider creative ways to share peace and greet one another
- Follow new emerging guidelines for food service as issued by local health departments
- Develop clear and open communication to continue to monitor the health and well being of those using the building or participating in ministries
- Pastoral or lay visits can safely take place with time limits on visits and while observing best hygiene practices
- Develop clear lay care visitation policies

## PHASE 5

### NEW CONSIDERATIONS

#### Vulnerable populations

Are masks required? Are volunteers trained in hygiene best practices?

#### Spiritual formation

Does the church have vulnerable adults in class? Is online faith formation still an option? Do we do temperature checks in order to attend age-based ministries and adult Bible studies? Are masks strongly encouraged or required? Can cleaning be done in real time?

#### Administration

Does the church have clear guidelines in place for staff? Is there a wellness policy enforced? Will staff be trained in hygiene best practices? Does the church have a clear policy for those who are sick? Does the church do or require temperature checks? How can the church be more a part of the community? How can the pastor and staff be most accessible? What is the best way for committees to function? How can technology continue to engage church leaders in the work of the church?

#### Ministries

Is the church following all guidelines developed by the church's Health Team? Are all building use policies being observed?

#### Special Events

Before fully opening, has the church prepared to follow the hygiene and sanitation best practices from IDPH or CDC?

## BEST PRACTICES

- Review the ways in which the facility and its characteristics are an aid to ministry, and if there are ways in which it is an obstacle to ministry
- Clean, disinfect and sanitize nursery before, during and after use
- Enforce wellness policies for groups, ministries, and staff
- Continue to encourage and strengthen online giving
- Keep clean all spaces and materials used for spiritual formation gatherings (Bible study, Children's/Youth Ministries)
- Continue to develop strong online connections with community groups
- Develop creative ways to reach out virtually
- Offer both in-person and virtual options to meet with people and develop new relationships

## MOVING BEYOND PHASE 5

- Congregations must adapt to the new health and hygiene practices that are implemented.
- Ongoing vigilance will be necessary.
- Continued virtual worship and ministry will enable more people to participate in a variety of ways

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Is the church able to adhere to new health and hygiene best practices?
- Have new norms been incorporated in to church policies and practices?
- Are people comfortable if they choose to adhere to more strict physical distancing and safety guidelines?
- Do the church's practices protect the most vulnerable?
- What adjustments have been made that have strengthened the ministry?
- How will the church continue to grow and strengthen its online ministry?



# RESOURCES



[Accommodating Vulnerable Populations and People with Disabilities\\*](#)

[Bishop Dyck's Guidance for Congregations Regarding Virtual Communion](#)

[Cancelling Summer Programs](#)

[CDC Resources for Faith Communities](#)

[Christian Education, Spiritual Formation & Small Group Guidelines\\*](#)

[Congregational Staff Guidelines for Returning to Work\\*](#)

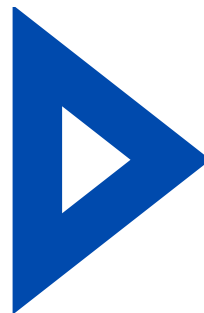
[Dr. Michael Osterholm on the Pandemic and Opening In-Person Worship \(ELCA Minneapolis Synod Webinar\)](#)

[FAQs from NIC Office of Risk Management and Ministry Protection](#)

[Forming a Health Team / Building Policies and Protocols\\*](#)

[Funerals in the Time of a Pandemic: A Toolkit for Children & Families](#)

\*includes additional links compiled by the NIC ReTurn Team





# RESOURCES



[Humanitarian Disaster Institute: "Preparing Your Church for Coronavirus"](#)

[Illinois Guidelines for Faith Communities](#)

[Pastoral Care Considerations\\*](#)

[Protecting Worker Health: Reopening Guidelines for Worship Services and Religious Gatherings](#)

[Recommended Guidance for Funeral Homes](#)

[Social Distancing Room Space Capacity Calculator](#)

[State of Illinois COVID-19 Statistics](#)

[Staying Connected via Amplify from Resource UMC](#)

\*includes additional links compiled by the NIC ReTurn Team

