



CHECKLIST:

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REOPENING YOUR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

While many areas are still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis, some communities are beginning to discuss returning to some new form of normal. While the specific details of reopening your religious organization will be dependent on federal, state and local guidelines, there are some things you can begin to do.

We recommend forming a Reopening Team made up of your organization's employee and volunteer leaders to discuss operational details. As you assemble this team, consider including the leaders of worship ministry, music ministry, adult/youth/child ministry, outreach and welcoming committees, ushers and security.

When You Will Start to Reopen

Review guidelines from governmental agencies like the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), state office of emergency management and the local health department. We anticipate that the legal guidance for reopening will come from state and local officials. Opening in violation of governmental order or without following guidance from authorities exposes your organization to potential liability.

Gather feedback from your members on their willingness and interest in attending in-person services. Consider polling your congregation to obtain input on how and what activities reconvene in person. Many may hesitate to rejoin crowds for worship initially.

How You Will Start to Reopen

Discuss which activities will begin to meet in person, which may include midweek meetings or weekend services.

Consider providing both in-person and online opportunities for the foreseeable future. Encourage vulnerable individuals, including the elderly and those with severe underlying medical conditions such as respiratory issues, to continue the online experience and not join physically. Also, remind attendees that they should not attend while exhibiting any symptoms of illness.

Discuss whether children's programs will continue as they have in the past. While there are a number of measures that can be taken to encourage adults to practice social distancing, it is far more challenging to maintain distance and to limit physical contact between children.

Think about how your church will handle summer camp programs, weddings, funerals and other special events. While it is important to celebrate as a congregation, keep in mind that these gatherings can provide opportunities for disease transmission.

Prepare your facility to be reoccupied. Make sure utilities are fully functioning and building systems are ready. [Inspect the property](#) to assure no damage has occurred in your absence.

Develop a plan to meet social distancing requirements. In some cases, this may mean either removing or marking seats as closed in order to significantly reduce capacity. It may also mean wider aisles and controlling entrances and exits.

What Safety Measures You Will Adopt

Consider what personal protective equipment (PPE), like masks and gloves, might be appropriate for your organization. Provide hand sanitizer at entrances and in other key places.

Consider plans to conduct health screening for staff, volunteers, visitors and vendors entering the facility. There may be a need to conduct screenings for individuals attending services as well.

Determine how you will handle certain service elements that typically involve physical contact like communion, greeting and offering. Consider contactless options, such as sharing bulletins and hymns via email and [collecting offerings online](#).

Revisit plans and procedures for cleaning and disinfecting facilities. All surfaces should be cleaned using disinfectants on a regular basis, including between services. Pay special attention to frequently touched surfaces like door handles, pews and railings.

As you begin to meet in person again, keep in mind all of the security issues that were present previously. The Department of Homeland Security has [issued a warning](#) encouraging religious organizations to be especially vigilant as they reopen. With the additional stressors over recent weeks and months, there is likelihood that those predisposed to violence could become more active. For more information regarding security issues, including our alliance with Strategos International, please see our [armed intruder resources](#).

Who You Will Entrust with New Responsibilities

With expanded procedures and processes, you may experience a need for additional staff or volunteers to assist. Be sure to identify any new roles and fill them accordingly.

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- ▶ Protect yourself, your organization and the people who depend on it. Our resource center includes a wealth of materials featuring safety and security knowledge from our experts and the industry leaders we work with. [Learn more](#).