

Updated as of 6 p.m. on April 23, 2020. Please check back for updates.

Guidelines for Reopening and Returning to Church Buildings

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Please note: Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, is in constant contact with the Governor's Office. It is the governor's recommendation that churches continue to proceed only with drive-in services or online.

(Specific to Georgia: You must still follow the 20 Guidelines of the Shelter-in-Place order that is still in effect until April 30, 2020. [Here is a link to the document.](#) See the last two pages for the requirements. These include temperature checks for those who exhibit symptoms. Here are the best practices for religious services from the Governor's Office: [Click here.](#) For more on the Shelter-in-Place Order, [please read this article.](#))

You must decide what is best for your congregation and community. If you have specific questions, please don't hesitate to ask, but not every answer will apply to everyone in the state based on their location. Please note that if you have any hesitancy on returning to the building, it is better to wait. There is no rush to get back to the building, although we are looking forward to that day!

As our churches reopen, we encourage you to follow and consider these guidelines. These are considerations, not mandates.

BE INFORMED

Know the risk factors for the virus. This can help you make decisions on staffing, volunteers, and whether you will return sooner or later. For example, those with preexisting conditions and those over 65 years old are at a higher risk of experiencing worse symptoms than others if they contract the virus.

Poll your congregation ([here's a link through LifeWay](#)) on their expectations. Be in constant communication. Also know that there is no rush to return to the building. You can continue doing online services or drive-in church if your congregation is still experiencing anxiety and fear.

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PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

1. Deep clean your entire church. Where will germs be transferred? Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, and microphones.
2. Use chemicals and disinfectants as directed and allow for the proper dry times. [Here is a list of approved disinfectants for COVID-19.](#)
3. Pay attention to the preschool and children's areas. Consider removing everything nonessential from the room to limit surfaces for potential contamination and do a thorough cleaning in between uses. Please see the preschool/children section for more information to consider.
4. Remove Bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc., from the backs of chairs/pews.
5. Post signs about not shaking hands and doing non-contact greetings. You can promote the hashtag #itsoktosmileandwave.
6. Consider placing some kind of blocks in your sanctuary or classrooms to ensure social distancing. Tape, remove chairs, use cones, etc. to indicate the distance needed.
7. Tell your congregation through flyers on the doors, email, and social media about how you've prepared the church for their arrival. Be sure to use the words "clean, safe, and mindful of health needs and issues in preparation for a non-touch experience" or something similar. Also say that if they are sick, then they should not be present and can join online instead.

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SERVICE TIMES AND LOCATION

1. Keep an online meeting option for those who are afraid or unable to attend your service in person. Many churches have seen a spike in engagement since their online presence has increased. Capitalize on it!
2. You can offer multiple services to encourage a greater chance of social distancing. One way to ensure your services are evenly spread is to have people sign up for a service. You can use Facebook events and have people mark which event they'll attend. With questions, you can reach out to our Content Strategist, Linda Wilkins at lwilkins@gabaptist.org.
3. Remember that if you have multiple services, you will need to clean between each service. You can shorten the service time to help with the timing of cleaning thoroughly. Some churches are moving to having multiple services during the week to allow for cleaning in between service times.
4. Determine how many volunteers you have available to assist. Limit volunteers to those who do not have preexisting conditions and those who are under 65 years old.

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WORSHIP SERVICES

1. Celebrate the return! Hopefully you have some time to plan a Comeback Service. Encourage praise, provide times of testimony, and a sermon that spurs people to embrace life changes God has revealed to them during the quarantine.
2. If your people are from the same household, they can sit together. Consider spacing out other groups. See the preparation section.
3. Remember to avoid handing out bulletins, and instead project all announcements on screens. Also do not allow people to come by and pick up bulletins out of stacks.
4. Change the way you offer communion. Avoid passing a plate or bowl. LifeWay.com offers combined elements of communion that can be picked up as people enter – but make sure that people are not picking from a deep bowl.
5. Avoid passing microphones on the stage.
6. Continue offering online giving options. Have stations in the church where people can drop offerings instead of passing a plate.
7. Come up with a fun way to greet others in a no-contact way.
8. Clean the pulpit after every use.
9. Consider dismissing in an orderly way to ensure there is social distancing.

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AMENITIES: COFFEE, BULLETINS, AND HAND SANITIZER

1. Restrooms: You must decide whether you will allow bathroom usage at this time. If you don't think you can allow it, then it may not be time to return to the building.
2. Do not hand out bulletins. Do not allow people to come by and pick them up out of stacks.
3. We recommend withholding coffee stations, donuts, or groups meals at this time. You can stay attuned to the guidelines to know when is best to reintroduce these services.
4. If you choose to keep your restrooms open (the Governor's Office recommends keeping them closed), be sure to post signs about washing hands in bathrooms with appropriate guidelines to doing so.
5. Display hand sanitizer throughout the church. It may be difficult to obtain at this point, so consider if you should meet in person without this element.
6. Supply masks for those without one to increase comfort levels. Again, these may be difficult to obtain, but you could have people make masks as a service to the church.

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STAFF: GREETERS AND VOLUNTEERS

1. Provide security and enlist ushers to be both inside and outside greeters. Instruct them on how to greet post-quarantine: NO hand shaking or hugs.
2. Ensure doors are propped open or have the greeters hold them open.
3. Greeters and Volunteers should be able to answer questions on procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Train them beforehand if possible.
4. If your bathrooms are open, have greeters monitor the bathrooms to ensure hands are washed and social distancing is followed.
5. Consider a temperature check on all staff and volunteers.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUPS

1. The Governor's office is recommending that you have your church members enter the building and immediately go into the worship service to be seated. For more information, see the "Worship Services" section.
2. Consider whether you will have Sunday school or small groups (see previous point). Make sure you're communicating if and when these classes will resume.
3. Consider dividing your groups to maintain the social distancing standards. You can also allow small groups to use the church on different days/nights if you choose to meet in person.
4. If you do have class, please know you should clean the doorknobs, water fountains, and other high traffic areas in between uses.
5. Have a plan for your leaders and teachers. Will they discuss what God revealed to them in the quarantine? Will you encourage a prayer and praise time?
6. If you don't have class, make sure you have provided an outline for your teachers and leaders to continue engagement for your groups. This is still an excellent time to build classes and community.

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PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN

1. The American Academy of Pediatrics [recommends that children 2 years of age and under](#) do not wear masks or face coverings. Please keep this in mind as you make decisions.
2. Here is a good rule of thumb: If you wear a mask, it's too soon to have your preschool and children areas open. Masks may scare the children.
3. Consider not opening preschool and children on the first Sunday back. Some churches are choosing to reopen the preschool and children areas when schools are open.
4. Pre-register children to limit how many are in any room at a time. Some churches are starting with a five child limit in each room at first.
5. Limit leaders in the preschool and children's areas to those who do not have pre-existing conditions. Also limit leaders to those under 65 years old.
6. Have extra volunteers to help in the preschool ministry where some children may suffer from separation anxiety after only being with parents for a long time.
7. Have only one person handle child check in stations and do not pass the check-in device.
8. Do not let parents past the "double doors" and instead drop them off at the welcome desk.
9. Have a check list of what's been cleaned and when in each room.
10. Develop a list of procedures for your volunteers. Train them on this list through Zoom prior to the first meeting.

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CHOIRS, ORCHESTRAS, PRAISE TEAMS, BANDS, ETC.

1. Praise Teams: Do not use the full team. Consider rotations. Assign microphones and use the same one every time.
2. Choir: Consider suspending choir practices as forceful breathing and exhaling can expel the virus further if someone is infected. However, you could consider using smaller numbers as you reintroduce choir to the service. Also space members out appropriately (consider using a diamond pattern with six feet of spacing between members).
3. Orchestras: Keep parts to a minimum and ensure the orchestras are spaced appropriately. Encourage brass players to bring their own towel to catch spit so it doesn't land on the carpet.
4. Consider not using choir robes as space for robe changing may be limited. Just as healthcare workers change or wash their coats after each use, so should the robes be washed.
5. Wipe down music stands after each use.
6. Dismiss the choir in a fashion to allow distancing.

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TECH TEAMS

1. Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, etc. after every use. Keep a record of when each item was cleaned. DO NOT use water. Rubbing alcohol or alcohol-based cleaners are best.
2. Rotate your tech team if possible. Again, encourage those who feel sick or run down to not come into the service.
3. Keep using the online services. Facebook may be more accessible as many people have accounts, but consider other options like YouTube for those who'd like to watch on their smart TVs.
4. Add in text on screens through projectors if you haven't already. This may be a good opportunity to do so. Secure a CCLI license for copyright compliance if you do.