# *Guidelines for the Phased-in Reopening of EOC Church Buildings*

**John Wesley's Three Simple Rules: Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.**

*"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." – John 15:13 (NIV)*

## A Message from Bishop Tracy S. Malone and the Extended Cabinet

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the congregations of the East Ohio Annual Conference have shown tremendous love, creativity, leadership, and resilience. You are living evidence that the Church is the people, not the building. You have embodied the love of Christ as you have cared for one another, witnessed to the Gospel through worship in many different forms, and shown your commitment through service to others in this difficult and often scary time. We know how hard this has been and we are so grateful for you.

Since we initially closed our buildings, the COVID-19 disease is even more widely present and equally dangerous. As of this writing, more than 70,000 Americans have died from this disease in just a few months. The whole world is grappling with living under pandemic conditions with a variety of unknowns for longer than any of us would like.

We offer these guidelines for our churches to do less harm while figuring out new ways to do good among the new complex reality in which we are living and ministering. We have not set firm dates for the different phases described on these pages so that we can monitor and react to rapidly changing conditions. It is possible that progress may not be linear; we might have to go back and forth between different phases and possibly make changes when we learn new things, if that is the most loving thing to do.

As of the release of these guidelines, we continue to be in Phase 1, which began in mid-March. God will guide us in reimagining church so that it makes people's souls well without making their bodies sick. Being guided by love will mean very concrete things, like wearing masks; thinking carefully and moving cautiously as we plan to reopen our buildings; as well as soul work, like laying aside our preferences to reduce the risk of infection to another.

We will follow State of Ohio leaders who weigh the various aspects of the public good in trying to set the course on safer practices related to employment and public gatherings. These Guidelines for Phases of being Church during the Pandemic reflect current State orders to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus. They were developed based on the best advice of medical professionals who are also faithful United Methodists in East Ohio churches.

Each pastor and each church leadership team will need to thoughtfully discuss when and how to implement these guidelines in your particular buildings in ways that demonstrate love and consideration of all of the risks involved. Loving others means that their well-being is our priority. Inviting the church back to the building will also require intense preparation. It will take longer than any of us want it to take. We do not want the many sacrifices that people have made to be undone now!



**East Ohio** Conference
The United Methodist Church

We celebrate the variety among our nearly 700 United Methodist churches while recognizing the challenge in sharing one set of guidelines. Some of you have been asking for this level of detail while others may feel this is more than you need. If you have additional questions, please contact your district superintendent or respective Conference staff person – we are here to resource and equip you!

Please continue to support your pastor as a human being – one who is coping with their own stress, grief, weariness, family circumstances, and changing dynamics of the working environment. Grace and patience should be most evident in church relationships. This is a time to work together and support every person connected to your congregation, including your pastoral leader and their family.

This is also a time to be amazed at the great good God can do when we can open ourselves to the new things God wants to do among us. What are we learning during this time? We will never go back to the old "normal," as much as we might want to do so. Yet, we have every confidence that new ways of being the Church and engaging in vital ministry are emerging during this time of transformation and rebirth. We invite you to prayerful, collaborative, imaginative, and faithful work as you embrace your sacred calling to practice the greater love of Christ.

Bishop Tracy S. Malone and the Extended Cabinet

### *A Note about this Resource*

This resource has a bookmarked table of contents for ease of use.

*If using a PC or MAC:*
If viewing this resource in a web browser, there is a bookmark or table of contents tool in the pdf toolbar at the top of the pdf window. If you would rather download this resource and view locally on your computer, the bookmark tool will be in the toolbar on the left side of the pdf window.

*If using a mobile device:*
For full functionality with the bookmark feature you may need to first download a pdf viewer and open or import this resource into that app. Once you have opened the file in a pdf viewer it will function the same, with the bookmark tool at the top of the pdf window.

## Using these Guidelines

- Behind each of these guidelines is an effort to reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus.
- The best public health evidence available right now suggests that the coronavirus is spread by droplets from speaking, breathing, singing, coughing, yawning, and sneezing. The virus survives on many surfaces. It enters our bodies through the mouth, nose, and eyes.
- We recommend that each church develop a task group to work on the necessary adaptations. We hope laity could offer learnings from their careers – such as medicine, insurance, human resources, and essential businesses which have been adapting to the pandemic all along.
- The pastor(s) and council (or equivalent) should mutually and prayerfully decide when their respective church should begin the next phase in these guidelines, based on the government relaxing restrictions as described below and the church's readiness to welcome people according to the guidelines. The Conference will offer a recommended phase and publicize it on the EOC website, **www.eocumc.com**.

## All Phases

- Follow the guidance of your local health department, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), government officials, hospitals, care facilities, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC); and pray for them.
- Let your church know how you will communicate updates.
- Post signs with guidelines for entry and directing folks with symptoms to stay home and seek medical attention.
    - See the resources at the end of these guidelines for the latest list of symptoms and an infographic that you can post on the doors to the church building.
- Out of great care for others, everyone is strongly encouraged to wear masks whenever they are together for church purposes or in the church building.
- Maintain physical distance as directed by public health orders. This is how we love each other right now.

## Phase 1: Gather Virtually – Limited Building Use

During Phase 1, we continue living into the reality that the church is the people, not the building. The communion of saints is held together in God's love. We care for each other at a physical distance in order to preserve lives. This phase will last at least as long as the stay-at-home, work-from-home, and group-size-under-10 orders are in place.

- Churches should hold online or drive-in worship only.
    - See the guidelines below for drive-in worship.
- Small groups, classes, and committees should meet remotely as much as possible.
- Mission efforts requiring physical presence should only be those that address essential needs – like food pantries – if they can be done using safety protocols.
- Anyone in the building should be wearing a mask.
- Weddings and funerals – if they take place at all – should have fewer than 10 people, perhaps only inviting immediate family and limiting publicity.
- Continue limiting office functions to essential operations. Stagger staff work times, wear masks, and clean surfaces before leaving.
- People should stay at home and work from home as much as possible.

### *Drive-In Worship Guidelines*

- Everyone must remain in their own cars occupied only by their household members.
- If people have their windows down, they should be wearing masks.
- No-touch worship rituals should be used, meaning drop-in offering boxes, worshippers bringing their own communion elements, and no handing out of bulletins.
- Comply with the direction of local health departments and law enforcement, as well as U.S. copyright and broadcast regulations.

## Phase 2: Small Groups Gather

During Phase 2, worship remains in Phase 1 because of the need to prepare for worship to enter Phase 3 and/or because public health indicators demonstrate larger groups should not be gathering yet. However, small groups such as Bible study and other spiritual groups, committees, and office functions can begin to meet together in-person.

## Phase 3: Larger Groups Gather in Limited Formats

During Phase 3, we meet in small groups and creatively as the early Church did. This is a time to continue focusing on the deep dive of faith that occurs in small groups, while cautiously increasing the number of people who gather together in-person following the cleaning and distancing guidelines.

The clearest indicator of beginning this phase will be when public health orders increase the number of people who can safely gather together, and/or when those orders reopen public venues or businesses where larger number of people gather in closer proximity.

Church Council, Administrative Board, or Single Board and the church pastor(s) should have serious conversation around: their ability to encompass the following guidelines; the likely vulnerability of their particular congregation; balancing the need to meet in-person versus the quality of connecting remotely; and the reality that relaxing restrictions is affecting the transmission of the virus – meaning, that because the virus has a two-week incubation period, a rise in new cases may not show up immediately.

### *General Practices*

- Continue offering remote or hybrid options where it makes sense to accommodate different risk levels.
- Deep clean the building before first opening, including removing pew seat pads when possible.
    - For deep cleaning procedures, see the CDC guidelines at the end of this document.
    - Train and equip everyone (paid and volunteer staff) in safer cleaning procedures.
    - Train staff and volunteers on disinfection procedures and personal safety.
        - See both the CDC guidelines and the glove removal instructions in the resources at the end of this document.
- Make plans for frequent cleaning and cleaning between groups.
    - Stock up on supplies.
        - See the CDC guidelines for what is effective.
    - Consider limiting areas that are used to facilitate cleaning.
- Ensure readily available stocks of tissues, soap, and trash cans anywhere people will be gathering and/or where they will be touching doors, handrails, elevators, etc.
- Look for ways to increase fresh air flow in your setting.
- As you take a look at your restrooms, you will need to consider factors like how often you can clean them when the building is occupied and how many can use them at a time.
- Develop a plan for communication and contact tracing in the event someone who has been in the building later tests positive for COVID-19.
- High-risk individuals should continue to stay home as much as possible.
    - This could include the pastor and other staff.
    - For the most updated high-risk conditions, see the CDC guidelines.

### *Worship Practices*

- Worship will vary based on number of worshippers and their risk factors, the physical worship space, and the available accommodations.
- Worship attendance will be capped by public health guidelines – either as a limit on the actual number of people or as a percentage of fire code occupancy – as well as the ability to maintain physical distance between household units (a six-foot radius in all directions – behind, in front and to both sides).
- Since we expect it to take longer for many people to feel comfortable returning to the church building – and to continue building the momentum of your digital outreach – continue to share online worship, perhaps in partnership with another church.
- Drive-in worship may be preferred to minimize cleaning in the church.
- While it may be easier for smaller-attendance churches to maintain physical distance, they need to carefully consider the risks of those expected to attend, given the higher fatality rates among those 60 years of age or older.
- In light of all of the changes, it will be helpful for you to communicate your policies in advance so that the congregation can know what to expect. This is a chance for us to care for each other by sharing which symptoms should cause people to stay home for their own healing and for the protection of others.
- Managing traffic flow requires more thought than most of us have ever given it and it will be unique to each space. You may need to designate only certain doors to be used so you are able to keep them cleaned and ensure there is sanitizer at them – or you may just want to keep them propped open. Many hallways are not wide enough for both physical distancing and two-way traffic, so you may have to mark a traffic flow as some stores have done.
- Churches which typically see more than the current temporary limit in worship will have to be creative and careful, answering questions like these:
    - Can you offer multiple services, including times beyond Sunday morning?
        - How will you clean between and possibly during services?
    - Can you offer multiple settings, such as streaming to your fellowship hall?
    - Would some form of house churches make more sense, wherever they might safely meet?
    - What will you do if you reach capacity? Will people need to make a reservation in advance to attend or attend alternate weeks?
- Consider marking distances with tape or other signage.
    - What will six feet between household units look like in your space?
    - Can you make microphones no-touch by leaving them on a stand and marking where those not speaking should stand?
    - Where should musicians stand/sit?
    - Does your A/V set up need to be spaced or cleaned differently?
- To praise God and care for those present, all musicians and worship leaders should maintain significant physical distance from anyone else, which may require adaptation. Congregation singing is strongly discouraged because singing propels droplets farther.
- Eating together cannot happen safely since it involves shifting face masks. We encourage churches to wait until Phase 4 to once again serve communion, coffee/fellowship hour, and eat-in meals.
- While the risks involved with baptism are lower, people will likely find the sacrament more meaningful in Phase 4, when many of the restrictions are removed, so we encourage waiting.

- We offer the following questions to help you think of ways to make no-touch worship meaningful:
    - Greeters: How will they convey welcome from at least six feet away? Where can you place sanitizer on either sides of the doors that people need to open themselves?
    - Passing the peace: Will it be words spoken? Bowing to each other? Turning in place to smile at everyone in the room? Or something else?
    - Welcome/Attendance pad: Will it be replaced by an usher head count, or by papers to drop in the new offering box, a Google form, or something else?
    - Offering: Since you shouldn't use an offering plate that gets passed from person to person in the pews, will you have some combination of electronic giving and drop-in boxes? How will you care for the spiritual aspect? How will you count the offering to ensure that bare hands won't touch the bills/checks? Is the counting room large enough to keep six feet between counters?
    - Bulletins: How will you make announcements and worship order as low touch as possible? Can screens and email take their place? Can people simply follow the direction of the worship leader(s)?
- We encourage the task force and a small group of people to do a few dry runs to observe how your plan works with actual people before beginning worship with larger groups.
- Weddings and funerals should follow the Phase 3 guidelines.
- Charge Conferences can be held according to the above guidelines with attendance capped at current recommended limits. As always, they are only to be called by the district superintendent.

### *Small Group Practices*

- Any groups meeting in person need to follow all of the physical distance guidelines, including masks, distancing, and disinfecting after the meeting.
- Continue offering online and hybrid options. If offering online and in-person is technically burdensome, we recommend partnering with other UMCs to creatively "bear one another's burdens." One church might offer a study or prayer service online while the other would offer the in-person option.
- Children's ministries will depend upon such questions as the ability and willingness of children to wear masks and maintain physical distance, adequate volunteers, etc. At this time, no congregation should plan on nursery or toddler services. When childcare resumes, churches should model their plans on the guidance for daycares.
- Building usage by outside groups should be phased in slowly, dependent on their willingness and ability to abide by the guidelines as well as the church's ability to clean, and no cases of COVID-19 developing as usage expands.
- All churches should consult with their insurance carrier prior to phasing in other groups.

### *Office Practices*

- Regular office functions could resume, if desired, and if physical distancing standards, increased cleaning, and mask usage can all happen.
- Consider staggering shifts.
- Custodians should be given protective gear, trained in deep cleaning procedures, and, when possible, conduct their work when others are not in the building.
- Staff should complete symptom assessments following ODH guidelines.
- Individuals who have any high-risk factors and want to work at home should be encouraged to do so.
- The church should also be flexible with any staff members who have children at home because schools and daycares are closed or operating differently.

## Phase 4: Church Closer to What it was Pre-March 2020

During Phase 4, many group functions and normal office functions resume, although heightened cleaning and regular mask use continue. Many things will look as much like the old normal as they are going to get. This phase probably begins about two weeks after similar relaxation takes place Statewide, group size limits have increased or been lifted, and infection benchmarks are holding steady or declining.

We do not know how soon we will reach this stage. That will depend on some combination of available vaccine, available drug treatment, and herd immunity, so we continue to pray God's blessing upon scientists and medical professionals. Recognize that some things will never go back to "before" and some accommodations will be permanent.

- All churches that are able to do so should offer in-person worship while continuing to provide remote or online worship, whether on their own or partnering with another UMC.
- While physical distancing measures will be relaxed, continue to avoid crowding. Churches may want to continue multiple services/venues and/or house churches.
- Watch for public health guidelines on communion, congregational singing, and community meals. Be creative about continuing to connect with people in smaller settings.
- Continue offering no-touch worship rituals.
- In-person meetings of Sunday school, Bible studies, small groups, teams, and committees should be safer. Continue offering online and hybrid options out of care, as you are able.
- Normal office functions resume with continued high levels of cleaning. Watch for public health guidelines on masks and distancing.
- Observe hospital and care facility guidelines about restricted in-person visiting and be creative about pastoral care and connection.

## Helpful Links

**Coronavirus symptoms**
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html

**Higher risk populations**
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html

**Cleaning guidance**
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html?deliveryName=USCDC_2067-DM26911

## Additional Resources

These resources can also be found on the following pages of this pdf, but you can use the links below to quickly download each resource individually.

**What You Can do if You are at Higher Risk of Severe Illness from COVID-19**

**CDC Guidance for Cleaning & Disinfecting**

**COVID-19 Symptoms**

# What You Can do if You are at Higher Risk of Severe Illness from COVID-19

## Are You at Higher Risk for Severe Illness?

Based on what we know now, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility

People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:

- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions
- People who are immunocompromised
  - Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications.
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease

## Here's What You Can do to Help Protect Yourself

**Stay home** if possible.

**Wash your hands** often.

**Avoid close contact** (6 feet, which is about two arm lengths) with people who are sick.

**Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces.

**Avoid all cruise travel** and non-essential air travel.

Call your healthcare professional if you are sick.

For more information on steps you can take to protect yourself, see CDC's How to Protect Yourself.

cdc.gov/coronavirus

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# GUIDANCE FOR CLEANING & DISINFECTING

## PUBLIC SPACES, WORKPLACES, BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, AND HOMES

SCAN HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION

### 1 DEVELOP YOUR PLAN

**DETERMINE WHAT NEEDS TO BE CLEANED.** Areas unoccupied for 7 or more days need only routine cleaning. Maintain existing cleaning practices for outdoor areas.

**DETERMINE HOW AREAS WILL BE DISINFECTED.** Consider the type of surface and how often the surface is touched. Prioritize disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.

**CONSIDER THE RESOURCES AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED.** Keep in mind the availability of cleaning products and personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate for cleaners and disinfectants.

Follow guidance from state, tribal, local, and territorial authorities.

### 2 IMPLEMENT

**CLEAN VISIBLY DIRTY SURFACES WITH SOAP AND WATER** prior to disinfection.

**USE THE APPROPRIATE CLEANING OR DISINFECTANT PRODUCT.** Use an EPA-approved disinfectant against COVID-19, and read the label to make sure it meets your needs.

**ALWAYS FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS ON THE LABEL.** The label will include safety information and application instructions. Keep disinfectants out of the reach of children.

### 3 MAINTAIN AND REVISE

**CONTINUE ROUTINE CLEANING AND DISINFECTION.** Continue or revise your plan based upon appropriate disinfectant and PPE availability. Dirty surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection. Routinely disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily.

**MAINTAIN SAFE PRACTICES** such as frequent handwashing, using cloth face coverings, and staying home if you are sick.

**CONTINUE PRACTICES THAT REDUCE THE POTENTIAL FOR EXPOSURE.** Maintain social distancing, staying six feet away from others. Reduce sharing of common spaces and frequently touched objects.

For more information, please visit **CORONAVIRUS.GOV**

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# MAKING YOUR PLAN TO CLEAN AND DISINFECT

**Cleaning** with soap and water removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. It lowers the risk of spreading infection.

**Disinfecting** kills germs on surfaces. By killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

## Is the area indoors?

**YES**

**It is an indoor area.**

**NO**

**Maintain existing cleaning practices.**

Coronaviruses naturally die in hours to days in typical indoor and outdoor environments. Viruses are killed more quickly by warmer temperatures and sunlight.

## Has the area been occupied within the last 7 days?

**YES**

**Yes, the area has been occupied within the last 7 days.**

**NO**

**The area has been unoccupied within the last 7 days.**

The area will need only routine cleaning.

## Is it a frequently touched surface or object?

**YES**

**Yes, it is a frequently touched surface or object.**

**NO**

**Thoroughly clean these materials.**

Consider setting a schedule for routine cleaning and disinfection, as appropriate.

## What type of material is the surface or object?

### Hard and non-porous materials like glass, metal, or plastic.

**Visibly dirty surfaces should be cleaned prior to disinfection.**

Consult EPA's list of disinfectants for use against COVID-19, specifically for use on hard, non-porous surfaces and for your specific application need. More frequent cleaning and disinfection is necessary to reduce exposure.

### Soft and porous materials like carpet, rugs, or material in seating areas.

**Thoroughly clean or launder materials.**

Consider removing soft and porous materials in high traffic areas. Disinfect materials if appropriate products are available.

# COVID-19 Symptoms

Help prevent the spread of COVID-19

**You may have COVID-19 if you:**

**Have one or both of these symptoms:**

- Cough
- Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing

**Have at least two of these symptoms:**

- Fever
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat

**Symptoms may be mild or severe and may appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus.**