



RESET   
RESTART  
RENEW

# best practices for resuming in-person worship

The health risks of COVID-19 apply to us all – clergy, staff and laypersons.

Acknowledging that local churches in the South Carolina Conference are at different places in their planning for a [return to in-person worship on or after June 14](#), we offer these best practices to help you create a plan, make decisions and set a course of action that leads to a safe, healthy worship experience for all. This is designed as a supplement to [Reset | Restart | Renew](#).

If you have any questions about this guidance, email [restart@umcsc.org](mailto:restart@umcsc.org).

## WORSHIP SERVICES

### Holy Communion

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus through shared foods and personal close proximity

- Actions:**
- It may not be safe to offer Communion when your church re-starts, so each church should consult a medical professional about the threat of COVID-19 in its context.
  - Once it is determined that it is safe to share Communion, follow safe practices:
    - Congregation and servers continue to wear masks.
    - Purchase individual, pre-packaged elements (cups, wafers, etc.).
    - Offer Communion liturgy at the end of the service.
    - As congregants leave the building, offer hand sanitizer and then distribute elements.
    - Those distributing the elements should [sanitize hands](#).
    - The congregation gathers outside the building to take the elements under the direction of the pastor.
    - In those settings where consuming the elements outside is a logistical impossibility, we strongly recommend refraining from offering Communion until it is safe to do.

## Holy Baptism

**Objective:** Honor traditions while keeping everyone safe

- Actions:**
- For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Limit to one person per filling of baptismal pool, bowl of water in the sanctuary.
  - Clean and disinfect baptismal pool, bowl, font, etc. after each baptism.
  - Limit participation at the baptismal font to members of the same household.

## Entering & Exiting the Worship Space

**Objectives:** Facilitate [social distancing](#) by controlling pathways, preventing two-way traffic, and ensuring everyone uses precautions

- Actions:**
- Encourage anyone exhibiting [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or not feeling well – as well as those who are in [high-risk populations](#) – to remain at home.
  - For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Provide [disposable](#) or [handmade masks](#) when attendees enter the worship space.
  - Do not allow two-way foot traffic through entry and exit doors, posting signs that indicate one-way traffic and direct people which way to go.
  - Place hand sanitizer at entries and exits.
  - Create a walk-through video or diagram to show traffic paths and entry/exit process.
  - Dismiss from worship by family, by row or by section of the congregation.

## Recording Attendance

**Objectives:** Prevent spreading the virus on shared surfaces; keep a record for [contact tracing](#) should we learn someone in attendance has contracted the disease

- Actions:**
- Maintain a record of everyone who attends worship.
  - Do not use physical attendance pads.
  - Consider establishing pre-registration for services to manage capacity and to create a list of attendees, should the need for [contact tracing](#) arise.
  - Create a way members and visitors can record their own attendance online, if feasible for your church. [Google Forms](#) is an easy-to-use option
  - Usher/greeter (wearing masks) fills out attendance register through verbal conversation as people enter.

## Worship Equipment & Vestments

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus on shared surfaces and clothing

- Actions:**
- [Sanitize all equipment](#) before and after each service.
  - Provide enough microphones, other equipment so leaders do not need to share.
  - Discontinue use of shared vestments, such as choir robes, acolyte robes.

## Interpersonal Interaction

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus through airborne droplets

- Actions:**
- For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Do not serve food and beverages before, during or after services.
  - Consider shortening worship services.
  - Recommend non-contact alternatives for “Passing the Peace” (smiling, waving, slight bow of the head, crossing your arms over your heart). [More ideas](#).
  - [No singing by choir and congregation](#), and no choir practice. Consider pre-recording all music, including solo performances.
  - Maintain spacing of at least 30 feet between the congregation and worship leaders.

## Seating

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus through airborne droplets

- Actions:**
- For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Mark pews to facilitate social distancing.
  - Family members who live in the same home can sit together, but must remain six feet apart from other families.
  - Churches with capacity issues should consider scheduling additional services or simulcasting services in multiple worship spaces (sanctuary, fellowship hall, etc.)

## Pew Items

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus on shared surfaces

- Actions:**
- Remove all items from pews, including Bibles, hymnals, pens/pencils, offering envelopes, attendance registers, prayer cards.)
  - Project liturgy and announcements on a screen, if possible.
  - Encourage members to bring personal Bibles.

## Giving

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus by not passing items from person to person

- Actions:**
- Do not distribute offering plates or baskets.
  - Encourage [online giving](#); specifically mention that option before offertory prayer.
  - At sanctuary doors, place [secure boxes](#) into which members can deposit their offerings.

## Volunteers

**Objective:** Keep clergy, staff and volunteers safe

- Actions:**
- Require all staff and volunteers to [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by working six feet apart.
  - Offer other, lower-risk roles for volunteers (greeters, ushers, etc.) who are in a [higher-risk population](#).
  - Create a sanitation team to keep things clean.
  - Consider temperature checks for all staff and volunteers.
  - Consider temperature checks for all who enter the building.

## Keeping the Worship Space Clean & Disinfected

**Objective:** Provide a clean and safe environment for worship

- Actions:**
- If sanctuary is used only on Sundays:
    - To protect staff, wait at least three days before performing routine cleaning.
    - No additional disinfecting required.
  - If sanctuary is used multiple times:
    - [Disinfect frequently touched surfaces](#) such as doorknobs, handrails, backs of pews, bathroom faucets, countertops, sinks, etc.
    - Use an [EPA-registered disinfectant](#) to kill germs on surfaces, per CDC guidelines.
    - Soft surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water, per CDC guidelines.

## Sunday School & Other Small Groups

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus through airborne droplets

- Actions:**
- Do not meet for Sunday school or other small groups, but continue to innovate creative ways to remain in touch and offer meaningful ministries online.
  - Consider allowing adult groups to meet outdoors – in groups of 10 or fewer – but for the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Groups that meet in person should continue to offer programming online so those who are at [higher risk of contracting COVID-19](#) can still participate.
  - Children and youth should not meet, because it is [difficult to maintain social distancing](#). Continue providing [online programming opportunities](#).
  - Do not plan in-person Vacation Bible School, but [explore digital alternatives](#).

## Children

**Objective:** Keep children safe during worship

- Actions:**
- Do not provide a nursery or any children's ministry during worship services.
  - Include "Children's Time" during worship service, but children should remain in pews with their families.

## Weekday Preschool

**Objective:** Prevent spreading the virus through airborne droplets

- Actions:**
- Generally, most of our preschools, daycare, children and youth ministries follow the guidance of their local public schools.
  - Regardless of whether your church offers year-round preschool or daycare, or you break for the summer, follow [CDC guidelines](#) for reopening.
  - If you are considering restarting preschools, daycare or children/youth activities, talk first with your [district superintendent](#).

## Alternatives to In-Person Worship

- Continue [online worship](#) through Facebook Live, YouTube, Vimeo, Zoom or other meeting platforms. If your live-streaming or recorded worship services include music of any kind, [be sure you have the appropriate license or permission](#).
- Drive-In Worship
  - Everyone must observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) at all times.
  - For the protection of all, clergy, staff and volunteers must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - No one should leave vehicles for any reason.
  - No bathroom facilities and no playgrounds.
  - Park every other spot, using volunteers or signage to direct parking.
  - No one exchanges anything.
  - Encourage anyone exhibiting [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or are not feeling well – as well as those who are in [populations identified as high-risk](#) to remain at home.
  - Buy a low-range radio transmitter ([keep it legal](#)) that attendees can tune to in their vehicles, or use a good quality public address system.
  - Consider electrical safety (outdoor extension cords, surge protectors, etc.).
  - Protect your equipment from the direct heat of the sun by placing it in a shaded area or under a tent; have a plan for inclement weather.

# NON-WORSHIP ACTIVITIES

## Church Leadership

**Objective:** Provide meaningful and productive meetings safely

- Actions:**
- Church leadership groups should meet online as much as possible.
  - If in-person meetings are necessary:
    - Limit participation to 10 or fewer persons.
    - For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
    - Do not serve food or beverages.

## Missions & Outreach

**Objective:** Offer ways to continue outreach without causing risk to participants

- Actions:**
- Cancel planned mission trips, including youth trips – at least through summer – and do not schedule any new trips until we know it is safe to do so.
  - Continue outreach to vulnerable populations (food distribution, homeless ministries):
    - For the protection of all, volunteers must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
    - Employ appropriate sanitation practices.
    - No sit-down meals.

### Communication

The importance of educating your congregation and communicating your protocols for restarting in-person worship cannot be overstated.

[Click here to read our recommendations.](#)

## Weddings

**Objective:** Honor traditions while keeping everyone safe

- Actions:**
- Consider an outside venue (church property, backyard, park).
  - For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Do not schedule meals or receptions or offer any food and drink before or after ceremonies.
  - No bulletins.
  - [No singing by choir and congregation](#). Consider pre-recording all music, including solo performances.
  - Stream wedding ceremony online.

## Funerals & Memorial Services

**Objective:** Honor traditions while keeping everyone safe

- Actions:**
- Hold a graveside service with limited number of attendees.
  - Invite others to participate in a parade of vehicles to pay respects.
  - For the protection of all, attendees must [wear masks](#) and observe [CDC social distancing guidelines](#) by remaining six feet apart.
  - Do not schedule visitation, meals or receptions, or offer any food and drink before or after ceremonies.
  - No bulletins.
  - [No singing by choir and congregation](#). Consider pre-recording all music, including solo performances.
  - Stream funeral or memorial service online.

### When in doubt

For more information and to keep up-to-date on the latest guidance, go to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 webpage](#).

### Acknowledgements

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