

REOPENING BEST PRACTICES FOR LOCAL CHURCHES DURING THE PANDEMIC

Eastern PA Conference, The United Methodist Church

Updated May 2021

The Eastern PA Conference places the health and welfare of our members and the surrounding community as the first priority in making decisions around occupancy of buildings and grounds. Congregations must be committed to the goal of flattening the virus curve by following all state and city guidelines; and they must have a reopening plan approved by their church councils. **Please continue to monitor the [PA.gov](#), [Phila.gov](#) and [CDC website](#) for up-to-date information.**

Overall Recommendations:

- **Capacity:** Revised guidelines for capacity from Governor Tom Wolf are expected on May 31, 2021. The Eastern PA Conference will recommend following the revised guidelines. Please make sure to check your local guidelines in addition to the state guidelines.
- **Symptoms:** Urge persons to not enter the church or attend gatherings when experiencing flu-like symptoms.
- **Masks:** According to the CDC, fully vaccinated persons are not required to mask indoors or outdoors, unless in crowded settings. In crowded spaces or with vulnerable populations, masking is recommended even for fully vaccinated persons. Unvaccinated persons should continue to mask and maintain social distancing (following CDC protocols).
- **Singing:** Singing can resume in congregational settings, but only vaccinated persons should sing aloud unmasked. Unvaccinated persons, including singing ensemble members, should continue to wear masks and practice social distancing.
- **Cleaning and Disinfecting:** The CDC continues to update guidance on surface transmission and cleaning protocols. This is information from April 2021: *The virus that causes COVID-19 can land on surfaces. It's possible for people to become infected if they touch those surfaces and then touch their nose, mouth, or eyes. In most situations, the risk of infection from touching a surface is low. The most reliable way to prevent infection from surfaces is to regularly wash hands or use hand sanitizer. Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces can also reduce the risk of infection.* [Read more.](#)
- **Communion:** Pre-packaged, sanitized communion packets continue to be the best option.
- **Small Groups/Bible study:** Bible studies and small groups can resume in person. We recommend maintaining some online options for high risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in public.
- **Office:** Office functions can resume as normal.
- **General Building:**
 - Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
 - Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
 - If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, put your communication plan into action, and cooperate fully with contact tracers.