

4 COMPONENTS TO REOPENING CHURCH AFTER COVID-19

Posted by Deborah Ike | May 8, 2020

Many churches are beginning to prepare to reopen for in-person services as their local authorities permit. With all the elements to manage, the idea of reopening can be exciting and overwhelming. As you consider how to safely welcome people back to church services, it's important to have plans in place and to weigh out all possible options.



HERE ARE FOUR KEY COMPONENTS TO YOUR PLANNING EFFORTS:

#1 – OCCUPANCY LIMITATIONS

Many governors are putting limits on the occupancy rates allowed for retail spaces, restaurants, and various gatherings (including church services). You'll need to find out what guidelines are in place for your location. Then, determine how to adhere to that standard. That may require you to increase the number of services offered each week and even have people register online for a particular service.

Another issue to consider is how to maintain social distancing during a weekly service. That might involve blocking off every other row in the sanctuary. You can put up signs to encourage people to refrain from the usual hugs and handshakes, etc. You may also have to suspend children's ministry for a while, as it would be tough to get little children to follow any social distancing rules.

While you've probably already canceled any in-person events for a while, one that most churches offer during the summer is Vacation Bible School, or VBS. Depending on what guidelines are in place for your location during the summer, you may or may not be able to host VBS. [Group.com](#) has a helpful post on how to plan for various VBS options this year.

#2 – SANITATION

Additional cleaning and disinfecting procedures are elements to factor into reopening for church services. This may include disinfecting high-touch areas such as door handles, restrooms, pews/seats, and countertops between services. Since this effort could take at least 30 minutes, you'll want to account for that as you decide how much time to leave between services. You may also need to ask for volunteers to help with these additional cleaning duties. Finally, providing hand sanitizer stations at each entrance would be helpful for those attending a service.

#3 – BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

Unfortunately, the sight of a smiling greeter offering a warm hug or handshake isn't so welcome anymore. You'll need to communicate to your congregation that it's best to maintain a six-foot distance from others for the foreseeable future. Signage throughout the building and announcements from the stage about this change will help remind people you care about their health enough to keep your distance (and encourage them to do the same).

Another topic to consider involves face coverings (or masks). While your state government may not require face coverings, you might want to have volunteers and staff members wear them at a minimum. Let people know that they're welcome to wear their face coverings to church. Consider providing free face coverings for those who would feel more comfortable attending if wearing one.

Finally, you'll want to determine how to handle taking up an offering and how to serve communion. Passing an offering plate doesn't seem to make sense with the potential to spread germs, so you'll need to find an alternative. Encouraging online giving is the easiest route since you probably have that set up already. Otherwise, many churches are looking to set up offering boxes in the sanctuary for people to drop in their tithes and offerings. For communion, there are several options for pre-packaged communion elements. You could have these set up on tables in the sanctuary for people to pick up themselves (or served by someone who is wearing a mask and gloves).

#4 – COMMUNICATION

With so many changes and the uncertainty created by **COVID-19**, communication is more critical than ever. Many people will remain hesitant to attend services in-person. You'll need to decide how to address their concerns while encouraging them to continue attending online if

needed. You'll also need to let people know about the changes to in-person services including occupancy limitations, cleaning procedures, wearing face coverings, and more.

Finally, you need to consider what to do if someone who attends an in-person service is later found to have **COVID-19**. How would you communicate the potential exposure to those who've been at an in-person service?

That's just a start to the factors surrounding how to reopen. Thankfully, you don't have to try and figure this all out on your own.

HERE ARE RESOURCES FOR YOU TO USE AS YOU PLAN TO REOPEN:

- **Vanderbloemen** is hosting a series of Facebook Lives to facilitate a discussion about how to reopen.
- **Smart Church Solutions** has a checklist for your facility manager to use in preparing the building to reopen.
- **Tony Morgan** has a post on various shifts churches need to make as you reopen.
- **Ed Stetzer** has an article in Christianity Today on the process of reopening.

As you prepare to reopen, whether that's in a week or in a few months, please proceed in prayer and with careful planning. There's no easy formula or standard plan for this situation. As you plan, you might want to bounce ideas off other church leaders. You can join us at the **Church Executive Administration & Operations Facebook Group** to get the feedback of others who're in the trenches too.

Please check out these **regularly updated COVID-19 resources** to help your church through this time.



This article originally appeared [here](https://churchtechtoday.com) at <https://churchtechtoday.com>.

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