

May 13, 2020

Dear Central Family,

COVID-19 persists in calling us to shelter in place. Continuing in spirit-led calm and intelligent precaution tests our patience. Cabin Fever is real; yet, for God's sake, we must indeed find patience. Loving our people, our church family and all whom we serve, we will return to the campus when confident of safety for all. As such, we will follow the direction of Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, the North Georgia cabinet and more. They send this guidance and offer this direction:

*We, your bishop and cabinet, greatly appreciate how you have followed the guidance we have shared regarding in-person worship. We know how much you miss each other and long to be together. After talking with medical experts and reviewing data today, we are asking you not to gather before June 22, 2020. This is the date current models predict that we in Georgia can begin safely relaxing our shelter-at-home strategies.*

Guidelines that will assist in planning our campus return are attached and also may be found at [www.ngumc.org](http://www.ngumc.org). Central is in the process of organizing a reentry team that will help us take the wisest course and implement the safest plan.

These times surely challenge us. Days of closeted-in-place feel unending. Know this Central: they shall end. We shall get through this. Uncertain as we are on many things, be certain that we serve the God of resurrection. This, too, shall pass.

Take good care. Keep the faith. Be safe and in Jesus' name,

Be well!

Pastor Ross

## Guidelines and Considerations for Resuming In-Person Worship in the North Georgia Conference

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson and our Conference Cabinet have consulted with experts in public health and the medical field on how churches might prepare to offer in-person worship again. From those consultations, they offer the following guidelines which will mitigate, though not eliminate, risks.

### **Consider**

- **PEOPLE:** The discipline of the pastor and congregation to be vigilant about adhering to the guidelines and how they will be implemented, plus the ability of church leadership to manage the group effectively.
- **PLACE:** The size and configuration of your worship space.
- **THINGS:** The availability of needed supplies such as masks and hand sanitizer.

### **PEOPLE**

Know that the risk of rapid contamination once people are in the space is great. When your church resumes in-person worship, people must:

- Maintain 6 feet of social distancing, not just once people are inside, but from the time they leave their cars, as they enter the worship space, and as they exit the space and return to their vehicles.
- Have no physical contact (hugging, shaking hands, etc.).
- Wear face masks (personal or provided by the church).
- Be vigilant about hand and face hygiene while in the space.
- Sanitize their hands each time after touching/using anything in the worship space.
- The risk of offering a nursery is very high. Plan for families to worship together at this time.
- The risk for choirs is high and the current best advice is not to have a choir sing at in-person worship.

### **Strategy**

- *Form a Health and Welfare Committee to help shape and then guide this process in your congregation. Recommended members include a medical professional, plus representatives from Trustees and Hospitality/Greeters. This team should also be informed by your local health department.*
- *Remind congregants not to touch their face and to use their hand sanitizer after touching any surface. Reminders should include verbal instruction, digital communication, and posted signage.*
- *Ask congregants to bring masks from home, and provide masks for those who do not have their own. Provide personal hand sanitizer for those who do not have their own.*
- *Remove pew hymnals and Bibles, instead rely upon projected slides and verbal instruction, and in the case of Bibles, encouraging people to bring their own copies from home as an alternative.*

### **PLACE**

Before the congregation returns to your church campus note that:

- Your facility should be cleaned/sanitized before and after gathering for each worship service.
- Your church campus must be prepared so that people can adequately comply with social distancing from the time they enter the property until they leave.
- Signage should offer clear directives to attendees regarding how to behave on campus to uphold protocols. Mark designated entrances, exits and building traffic patterns, mark sanitizer stations, remind people to practice social distancing, hand washing, and not to touch their faces.
- Offerings should be collected in bins at the entrances of the space so that people can place their offerings as they enter or leave. Those who count or handle the offering following the service must be reminded to wash hands immediately after they're finished, and to not touch their faces while handling money.
- Social distancing must also be kept regarding restrooms. Ensure 6 feet of social distancing while entering, using, and leaving the restroom along with vigilant hand-hygiene.

### ***Strategy***

- *Consider using every other or every third parking space.*
- *Consider using every other or every third pew.*
- *Consider exiting by rows instead of all at once, while maintaining the required 6 feet of social distancing.*
- *Consider limiting restrooms to one person at a time. Larger bathrooms could accommodate more than one person, but the recommendation would be to, for example, force the spacing by "closing" every other urinal or stall*
- *In posted signage, digital communication, and verbal instruction, use positive, encouraging language that reflects hospitality, while maintaining a commitment to loving our neighbor and doing no harm.*

### **THINGS**

Before your congregation gathers, ensure you have an adequate and sustainable amount of required supplies including masks and hand sanitizer and:

- Obtain adequate amounts of cleaning and sanitization products. Check cleaners for EPA and FDA label as being effective against coronaviruses. Alcohol-based surface cleaners are adequate to kill this virus.
- Obtain an adequate number of masks to offer a mask to anyone who does not arrive wearing their own. Work toward ensuring enough cloth masks are on hand can begin now.
- Everyone should be asked to bring hand sanitizer to worship, or be given hand sanitizer upon entering the space. (An alternative would be to have sanitizer stations available at all points of entrance and egress AND near any anticipated points of contact with surfaces within the space.)
- This is an opportunity to leverage technology. Consider providing digital material for services ahead of time.
- Microphones, keyboards, handheld electronic devices, and other surfaces may be difficult to clean or disinfect because they could be damaged if they became wet. A cleanable cover/skin (e.g., keyboard skin) could be used on the item to allow for cleaning while protecting the item. Always check to see if the manufacturer has instructions for cleaning.

- In the case of microphones, they could be used as long as they are disinfected, and, they are not touched by anyone or passed from person to person.

*Note that this "new normal" will continue for the foreseeable future until there is a breakthrough regarding a vaccine. Churches should continue to offer online worship and discipleship, and be prepared for resuming online-only worship should there be a resurgence of COVID-19 in our state or in your community.*

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### **Guidelines for Drive-In Worship**

Churches may consider offering “drive-in worship,” although guidelines must be followed to do so safely.

- Coordinate with your local law enforcement or emergency management agency.
- Utilize volunteers or signage to direct parking.
- Everyone, including volunteers, staff, and clergy, must follow social distancing guidelines at all times.
- No one should leave vehicles for any reason.
- No bathroom facilities.
- No playground.
- Park every other spot
- No one exchanges anything.