

Kiskiminetas Presbytery Ministry Commission Guidelines for Sessions During the COVID-19 Outbreak

The Ministry Commission strongly advises that all member churches of the Kiskiminetas Presbytery continue to remain physically closed until such time that returning can be safe and healthy for everyone. Ultimately each session needs to make its own decision through discussion and prayer at a session meeting to resume activities including worship and to communicate clearly the decisions to the congregation and to the Ministry Commission.

The moderators or the clerks of session need to provide the date of session actions and the outcome to the Presbytery Office as well as the date of any resumption of activities. These guidelines and links to other resources are provided to help you discern a way forward for our churches.

The Ministry Commission holds all of our church sessions, members, and friends in prayer as we work and pray to be the church of Jesus Christ.

Approved by Kiskiminetas Presbytery Ministry Commission May 2020

The Ministry Commission of Kiskiminetas Presbytery has adapted a document from the Wisconsin Council of Churches that was first released on April 23, 2020. This adapted document reflects the directives of the CDC, the State of Pennsylvania, and guidance from Guide One Insurance. The original document from the WCC can be accessed at the following URL: <https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>

What future we will find ourselves in depends not only on the behavior of the virus, but on the actions of people – as individuals, churches, communities, and governments. The way forward will not be a matter of following a timetable, but of faithfully discerning the signs of the times, and responding accordingly. It has always been that way for the church: “You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown....”

Please understand: for at least the next year, we anticipate our lives to be shaped by the timeline set by COVID-19. We face difficult choices between conflicting needs and imperatives. But we must avoid framing our situation in terms of a false choice between reviving the economy — or our churches — and saving lives. If we don’t continue our efforts to contain the virus, a new wave of infections and deaths will cause further damage, and we will lose what we’ve gained from the measures we’ve already taken. And if we push the envelope too far by reopening our buildings and resuming gatherings prematurely, we may unfairly force on our more vulnerable members the choice between keeping themselves and others safe and participating in congregational life like everyone else.

Kiskiminetas Presbytery has adapted this document from the Wisconsin Council of Churches and the WI Department of Health Services. We offer it as a framework to guide clergy and lay leaders in making

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healthy and pastoral decisions, not as a fixed set of guidelines that will account for every circumstance. We recognize that all ministry is contextual. You will have to be aware of the needs of your particular congregation, your polity and theology, and local conditions. You may need to consult local health officials or your judicatory leaders and your insurance company as you finalize decisions. Remember, too: we may move back and forth between phases if second or third waves of infections emerge. The advice of public health officials may change as more becomes known about COVID-19.

We pray for a spirit of discernment, for wisdom, and patience. We pray for researchers and medical professionals; for the planners; for the ill and recovering; for those grieving and struggling with the weightiness of these times. We pray for the watchers and wonderers, and all those who wait upon the Lord.

May the Holy One, our Advent Hope, Good Teacher and Resurrection Truth, guide your decisions.

Below are our recommendations of how to phase a church re-opening under the *Process to Re-Open Pennsylvania*.

A Model for Returning to Church

SAFER AT HOME

We recommend the following baseline practices:

- Churches holding online worship services only.
- Bible studies, small groups, etc. should be meeting online.
- Service ministries are using safety protocols and only addressing essential needs.
- Minimal, drop-in staffing sufficient for essential operations (deposits, mail processing, etc).

PHASE ONE

Phase One is when the county is classified as Red by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

What we recommend:

- Churches should continue holding online worship services only.
- Consider recording in the sanctuary, home, or office while maintaining at least 6 ft of space between people – greater distance between those who are singing.
- Churches without an online presence can find worship service by going to kiskipby.org
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals) should be kept to less than 10 in attendance. If you need to help set a limit, consider using immediate family. We advise only publicizing the date and location to those who are on the approved list to prevent hurt feelings or awkward situations
- Bible studies and small groups continue to meet online.

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- Keep office functions as limited as possible to ensure essential operations. Those in the office should be wearing masks; if you have more than one person in the office, make sure that surfaces, including the phone, are regularly sanitized.
- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions as identified by the CDC), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place.
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PHASE TWO

When the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania announces the change from a Red phase to a Yellow phase, the following items should be considered.

- Worship, depending on size:
 - Churches over 25 average worship attendance (AWA): We recommend that you continue holding online worship, recording from home or the sanctuary with participation from small groups of people. If you choose to have multiple services, have a plan for managing the number of people per service. Have a plan to clean surfaces between services. Consider exploring what small group worship could look like as an alternative.
 - Smaller churches (under 25 AWA) might consider holding in person worship but make sure their space is large enough to allow for social distancing. Have a contingency plan for overflows beyond the approved number of people.
 - Session should review the church's liability insurance to see if the church has communicable disease coverage. *Changes may be needed to protect the church, staff, and community adequately. (See page 7 and following)*

General recommendations for worship:

- Whichever alternative you choose, we recommend continuing to share worship online as there will be many who are at high risk and cannot join you, or may not feel safe to return even if precautions are in place.
 - Wear face masks while at church, as is recommended in public spaces.
 - Offering Communion/Eucharist safely will continue to be a challenge, as touching a face mask (to remove or shift it) contaminates it. Proximity to the communicant is a risk to the communion minister and those receiving. Give serious consideration to options within our tradition that minimize contact (gloves, barriers, etc.). This may mean you need to further postpone offering Communion to the faithful. Consult with your presbytery leadership regarding your options.
 - Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading droplets/aerosols which can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air. A face mask is unlikely to be enough to protect you or your neighbor. We recommend against singing in the sanctuary when the congregation is gathered.
 - Use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Consider removing hymnals and Bibles. Use bulletins (do not reuse) or screens as alternatives.

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- Distancing: Have people spread out in sanctuary space with one family unit per pew; keep empty pews between families. (6 foot minimum) Explore meeting in a fellowship hall or outdoors if your space is small.
- We recommend against offering a fellowship/coffee hour. Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling.
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals, confirmations) could take place in a more traditional way, with careful attention to guest lists so as to keep under the 25 person limit, and physical distancing plans.
- Consider allowing building users/renters back in if they are able to observe gathering limits and distancing protocols, and you are able to accommodate the cleaning needs.
- Church councils and leadership teams of less than 15 might consider meeting in person while wearing masks and maintaining *social distancing*, or continue meeting online.
- Small Groups and Faith Formation:
 - Offer opportunities for Bible studies and small groups to meet in person or online. We recommend maintaining some online options for people who do not feel comfortable.
 - Don't yet have small groups? This is an opportunity to renew relationships and perhaps start some small groups within your congregation. As conditions shift, these small groups can provide spiritual and emotional support to one another, and offer a setting for mission.
 - We recommend against offering Vacation Bible School in person.. Consider whether you might offer an online or no-touch drop-off activity.
 - Similarly, we anticipate mission trips to be unwise for some time. This is an ideal time for mission in the local area. Are there food pantries or other community services in need of volunteers? Practice the art of mission in place. Keep your groups small so as not to overwhelm the ministries you serve. You are there to assist, not to occupy or divert their resources.
- Church Business
 - Regular office functions could resume more or less safely while maintaining social distancing and wearing masks. Continue to attend to cleaning and sanitizing the office. Pay particular attention to high-touch surfaces and cleaning hands after dealing with the offering.
 - Smaller churches (under 25 members) could consider holding in-person membership meetings if official business is required.
 - Allow building users/renters to resume operations, with a plan to address cleaning needs and agreement to observe gathering and distancing protocols.
- 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.
 - Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
 - 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.
- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, should continue to shelter in place.

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PHASE THREE

When the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania announces the change from a Yellow phase to a Green phase, the following items should be considered.

Green does not mean that we are completely back to normal. You can help by encouraging careful hygiene, following of the physical/social distancing recommendations, encouraging people to stay at home if they have any symptoms of illness, and to cooperate with contact tracers if they are diagnosed.

- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, should continue to shelter in place during Phase Three. You should follow CDC and the Pennsylvania Department of Health recommendations.
- Wearing face masks while at church and in community ministry may still be recommended in public spaces.
- Worship:
 - We recommend that churches of all sizes offer in-person and remote/online options.
 - Physical distancing. We recommend that you avoid crowding in the sanctuary to the extent possible. Consider continuing to offer multiple services, as people may want to spread out.
 - Offering Communion/Eucharist safely will continue to be a challenge, as touching a face mask (to remove or shift it) contaminates it. Proximity to the communicant is a risk to the communion minister and those receiving. Give serious consideration to options within our tradition that minimize contact (gloves, barriers, etc.). This may mean you need to further postpone offering Communion to the faithful. Consult with your presbytery leadership regarding your options.
 - Watch for public health recommendations on group singing as we arrive at this phase. The Presbytery Ministry Commission will monitor recommendations from the CDC and Pennsylvania's public health officials and offer updates.
 - Continue to use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Consider returning hymnals and Bibles if you only have one service a week. The use of bulletins or screens are alternatives.
 - We recommend against offering a fellowship/coffee hour. Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling indoors.
- It should be safer for Bible studies and small groups to meet in person. We recommend maintaining some online options for high risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in public.
- Office functions could resume as normal, with attention to cleaning.
- Groups, teams, and committees could meet in person.

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Questions for Church Leadership to Consider

We offer this list of questions for the church Session and committees to consider in consultation with their clergy. We recommend that you work through these questions before re-launch:

- Has your insurance company weighed in on benchmarks for reopening, and for operating any programs? How will this influence your decision? See that attachment from Guide One Insurance entitled, “*CONSIDERATIONS FOR REOPENING YOUR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION*” on page 7 and following.
- Will you maintain an online streaming option once you are back together worshipping in physical space? How will that need to adjust when there is also in-person worship happening?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping in family groups sitting 6 feet apart?
- How will you discourage the receiving line after church and/or congregating after worship services?
- When in earlier phases of relaunch, how will you cap attendance at events so there is room for members of the community to join you and so you don’t go over guidelines?
- How can you encourage small group gatherings with the building of small group, discipleship systems, etc in the earlier phases of relaunching – possibly even before we move from Red to Yellow. How might you continue these when in-person worship resumes?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection in regards to communal spaces?
 - Worship bulletin disposal, hymnals, etc
 - Areas where small groups gather during the week
 - Nurseries and/or playgrounds
 - Pews or chairs following worship
 - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in your building
- How will you update your building use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual while maintaining privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

Additional Resources

- The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has offered a document entitled, *Returning to Public Worship Theological and Practical Considerations*. This document is 20 pages long and can be found on the Presbytery Website kiskipby.org and clicking on **Covid-19 Information**.
- **Synod of the Trinity** has numerous resources from around the Synod and the denomination which may be of help. <https://www.syntrinity.org/how-when-to-return-to-worship-safely/>
- **Center for Disease Control** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>
- **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania** <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

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Statement from Guide One Insurance to all Kiskiminetas Presbyterian Churches covered by Guide One Insurance-May 12, 2020

The churches that participate in the Kiskiminetas Presbytery Group Affiliated Program can feel at ease with their general liability insurance coverage and covid-19. The general liability policy does not have specific language that excludes coverage for a virus of this type. So if someone would contract this virus at church and wanted to sue the church for negligence the policy would most likely respond providing defense coverage and settlement if need be. As long as the church does it due diligence and follows the CDC guidelines for reopening and maintaining a safe environment and also follows our governor's orders on when they can open a claim brought against them should apply.

If anyone has a specific question regarding covid-19 please provide me specific details (a claim scenario) as I would have to refer to Guide One's claims department for answering your concern on coverage.

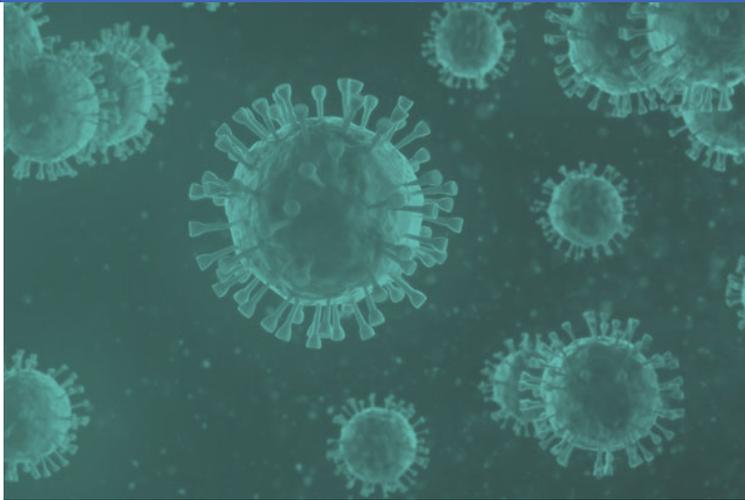
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CONSIDERATIONS FOR REOPENING YOUR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

April 27, 2020

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While many areas are still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis, some communities are beginning to discuss returning to some new form of normal. While the specific details of reopening your religious organization will be dependent on federal, state and local guidelines, there are some things you can begin to do.

We recommend forming a Reopening Team made up of your organization's employee and volunteer leaders to discuss operational details. As you assemble this team, consider including the leaders of worship ministry, music ministry, adult/youth/child ministry, outreach and welcoming committees, ushers and security.

When You Will Start to Reopen

- Review guidelines from governmental agencies like the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), state office of emergency management and the local health department. We anticipate that the legal guidance for reopening will come from state and local officials. Opening in violation of governmental order or without following guidance from authorities exposes your organization to potential liability.
- Gather feedback from your members on their willingness and interest in attending in-person services. Consider polling your congregation to obtain input on how and what activities reconvene in person. Many may hesitate to rejoin crowds for worship initially.

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How You Will Start to Reopen

- Discuss which activities will begin to meet in person, which may include midweek meetings or weekend services.
- Consider providing both in-person and online opportunities for the foreseeable future. Encourage vulnerable individuals, including the elderly and those with severe underlying medical conditions such as respiratory issues, to continue the online experience and not join physically. Also, remind attendees that they should not attend while exhibiting any symptoms of illness.
- Discuss whether children's programs will continue as they have in the past. While there are a number of measures that can be taken to encourage adults to practice social distancing, it is far more challenging to maintain distance and to limit physical contact between children.
- Think about how your church will handle summer camp programs, weddings, funerals and other special events. While it is important to celebrate as a congregation, keep in mind that these gatherings can provide opportunities for disease transmission.
- Prepare your facility to be reoccupied. Make sure utilities are fully functioning and building systems are ready. [Inspect the property](#) to assure no damage has occurred in your absence.
- Develop a plan to meet social distancing requirements. In some cases, this may mean either removing or marking seats as closed in order to significantly reduce capacity. It may also mean wider aisles and controlling entrances and exits.

What Safety Measures You Will Adopt

- Consider what personal protective equipment (PPE), like masks and gloves, might be appropriate for your organization. Provide hand sanitizer at entrances and in other key places.
- Consider plans to conduct health screening for staff, volunteers, visitors and vendors entering the facility. There may be a need to conduct screenings for individuals attending services as well.
- Determine how you will handle certain service elements that typically involve physical contact like communion, greeting and offering. Consider contactless options, such as sharing bulletins and hymns via email and [collecting offerings online](#).
- Revisit plans and procedures for cleaning and disinfecting facilities. All surfaces should be cleaned using disinfectants on a regular basis, including between services. Pay special attention to frequently touched surfaces like door handles, pews and railings.
- As you begin to meet in person again, keep in mind all of the security issues that were present previously. The Department of Homeland Security has [issued a warning](#) encouraging religious organizations to be especially vigilant as they reopen. With the additional stressors over recent weeks and months, there is likelihood that those predisposed to violence could become more active. For more information regarding security issues, including our alliance with Strategos International, please see our [armed intruder resources](#).

Who You Will Entrust with New Responsibilities

- With expanded procedures and processes, you may experience a need for additional staff or volunteers to assist. Be sure to identify any new roles and fill them accordingly.

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Prior to his career at GuideOne, Brian spent 20 years in risk management, disaster preparedness, and occupational health and safety for a university in southern California. He has responded to a wide variety of crises including earthquakes, building floods, bomb threats, and chemical spills. He has his MBA and is a Certified School Risk Manager with years of experience consulting with churches and non-profits in insurance, enterprise risk management, human resources issues, and emergency management.

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