

Dear Friends,

I continue to pray for you all as we continue to navigate being the Church in a pandemic world. I know it is not easy and I am thankful for the leadership each of you is providing your churches. I wanted to offer some clarifications on COVID questions. These are points the COVID Task Force has been asked and were shared with the Appointment Cabinet yesterday. I thought I would just share them with you. Remember if I can do anything to help you, let me know.

Blessings,
Jeff Wright

Clarifications on practical questions that have arisen regarding COVID-19. October 5, 2020

Small groups can meet in the church

As long as protocols are followed especially social distancing is practiced and masks are worn, small groups including Sunday School Classes (do not let them meet in small, confined rooms however), Bible Studies, Youth, Scouts, and School-age children can meet in the church. This would also include church committees and recovery ministries. Zoom is still recommended for any meetings if possible, especially if some members are not ready to return to in-person meetings. Small outside groups are allowed but they must follow the church's plan. No food or drink is to be included in any meetings. If there is not adequate space to social distance, then no meetings should be held indoors. Again, make sure your practice follows your plan. If a church needs to amend its plan to include this type of meetings, the plan will need to be resubmitted to the DS for approval.

Children Wearing Masks at Daycare – Inside or Out

We will leave it at the discretion of the particular daycare. We would advise that children 5 and up wear them. The concern will be cross-spacing. It is better to not allow groups to use the same space and keep groupings in the same area. However, make sure our practice matches your written policy. If it does not you need to add it to your policy and submit it again to your DS. Your parents could also use this as a teachable moment. One note, you will want to check with your insurance carrier to make sure your plan has coverage.

Children's Church/Worship

If a church has a separate Children's Church/Worship program that is allowed for school age children only. All participants need to follow your plans especially wearing masks and social distancing. If you do not have the space to do this, then it will not be allowed. Also, all leaders for such programs must be trained in advance in the church's protocol plan. Any church wishing to utilize this must include it in their plan and share the plan with the DS for approval. Again, make sure your practice follows your plan.

Nurseries are still not allowed

Nursery care up to age 5 is still not allowed. There are too many variables across the Conference for this to be conducted in a safe manner. Some churches have trained nursery workers, but many of our churches do not and it is whoever shows up and can keep the nursery. That is not safe. So, at this time, all children under the age of 5 (school -age) must remain with their parents if present at church.

Childcare for meetings

Childcare for meetings will be allowed for school age children age 5 and above. All leaders for such programs must be trained in advance in the church's protocol plan and not just whoever shows up. Any church wishing to utilize this must include it in their plan and share the plan with the DS for approval. Again, make sure your practice follows your plan.

Childcares and Shared Meeting Space

If you have a childcare or daycare that uses Sunday school space or other communal space, then the childcare needs to share in the cleaning of the rooms.

Birthday parties, Bridal or Baby Showers, Family Reunions, Homecoming Meals, Funeral Meals, and Anniversary Celebrations

These events are still not allowed inside church buildings. There is too much potential for community spread because of people outside of the area or church participating and not knowing the plans for the church. Also, food is not allowed to be served indoors.

Singing in Church

Congregational Singing is still not allowed! Special Music can be offered with as minimal participants as possible, such as no more than two singers, and all who are participating need to be socially distanced from each other and the congregation. No Choirs yet.

Fall Festivals, Trunk or Treats

Fall Festivals and Trunk or Treats are not allowed. However, you can be creative in doing some things such as a drive through caravan for your children where the treats are prepackaged and there is no personal touching in distributing the treats. You could also do things such as a walk-a-thon for charity. Be creative but be safe. Walk in Trunk or Treats where the community is invited and there is no crowd control are not to be held.

Christmas Plays, Cantatas, and Christmas Programs

Christmas Plays are not to be held this year due to not being able to social distance on the stage or in the congregation. However, you can use creativity and do things outdoors such as a drive-thru Living Nativity. Due to the singing regulations, no cantatas should be held this year. Christmas programs could occur if all precautions are followed. Christmas Eve services can be held following the guidelines. However, again, no congregational singing and Communion using creative caution.

Coffee and Snacks at Church

People can bring their own coffee, but coffee stations with coffee and snacks are still not allowed.

Apple Butter Making

Apple Butter making is allowed with the following restrictions:

- This should not be a social event. Only use enough people to get the job done.
- Everyone involved must wear masks and gloves all the time while working.
- You will need to change gloves when touching anything new.
- Everyone should social distance as much as possible while working.
- People can bring their own food and drink, but no communal food/drink will be allowed.

Yard Sales

Yard sales are still not allowed. There is too much potential for infection with people stopping by who are not wearing masks and then the potential for cross contamination with multiple people picking up items and looking at them but setting them back down. There is just no way to govern people's action in that type of setting.

Helping Pastors who are in a high-risk category and do not feel safe conducting services

DS's should work with pastors in this category on an individual basis. A few ways to help pastors do this is line up lay speakers. We also have people serving in extension ministries and in the conference office who might be able to help. We have a new class of persons who have just gone through local pastor's school who, if they are not already serving as supply, could help. And the DS could hold services for them.

Key Points

1. It is always key for the practice to follow the plan for each church. Deviation from the established plan could open the church for liability.
2. Any groups inside or outside the church that meet in the building must follow the church's plan, no exceptions.
3. Remember keeping people as safe as possible is still the main goal. The pandemic is not something that can be cleared by the passage of time. We all must be vigilant to what conditions are like in the local settings as we go along.

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