

During this season of discerning a “new-normal” for ministry, as we continue to receive new information concerning COVID-19, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and the extended cabinet are providing our best responses to the following frequently asked questions.

This document is current as of May 13, 2020. We encourage you to continue to follow all CDC guidelines as well as those from your state, city and county.

## Re-Launch Team

*Q: Who needs to be on the church’s re-launch team?*

**A:** We recommend the church’s pastor and a small (4-6) group of laity leaders.

*Q: How does it relate to the Administrative or Church Council?*

**A:** The re-launch team shares information and consults with the formal leadership of the church. Think of it as an “ad hoc committee” – they are a temporary committee formed for a specific purpose.

*Q: How should the re-launch team communicate with the congregation?*

**A:** This may vary some in each church. We encourage this team to use all of the church’s regular communication channels (email, website, phone, etc.) to best keep those in your church AND those who may come for the first time, up to date on the status of worship and other church ministries.

## Cleaning

*Q: What are the CDC guidelines for cleaning our church facilities?*

**A:** CDC guidelines for faith based groups and cleaning can be found on their website. ([www.CDC.org](http://www.CDC.org) / Coronavirus / Communities & Faith Based Organizations or <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>) Please keep in mind how fluid this situation is, and that some of the information changes each week.

*Q: What should we do if we cannot clean and/or keep our facility clean to the standards of the CDC guideline?*

**A:** Do NOT use church facilities for worship or other ministry activities where people are present unless you can follow the CDC guidelines.

## Worship

*Q: How necessary is social distancing when we worship together in person?*

**A:** It is vital for us to “Do No Harm” and to demonstrate our love for all people, and especially our more vulnerable people, by following the current social distancing guidelines.

*Q: What does social distancing look like in a sanctuary setting?*

**A:** There are too many different sanctuary settings in our churches for us to provide one set answer. The re-launch team will need to work through this for each individual church. Rev. Stephanie Bennett created a wonderful video to show what it might look like in her church. You can find a copy on the conference website under “Re-Launch” ([www.wvumc.org/re-launch-2](http://www.wvumc.org/re-launch-2)) We encourage you not to guess, but to take the time to mark out what it will look like in your specific sanctuary.

*Q: Do we need to wear masks in worship?*

**A:** Yes. Masks must be worn by everyone. You may need to have extra masks on hand in case someone shows up for worship, or any ministry activity, without one. Wearing masks when we are around other people is one of the most important things we can do to stop the spread of this virus. It is a visible sign of our willingness to “Do No Harm.”

*Q: Can we sing in worship?*

**A:** Do NOT have any type of congregational, or choir, or even soloist singing. The droplets we exhale can hang in the air for extended periods of time and be inhaled by other people in the area. Singing a hymn is like the whole congregation coughing for three minutes. (This also includes humming.)

*Q: Can we sing if we are all wearing masks?*

**A:** No. In fact, trying to sing while wearing a mask can actually be harmful to many people because of the restricted oxygen levels. Now is the time to appreciate spiritual music through listening and meditation.

*Q: Can we greet people as they come to worship or during a fellowship time?*

**A:** Of course! But do it without handshaking, hugging, or any form of personal touch—smile, wave, or cover your heart. If opening a door, use the 6’ social distancing.

*Q: How do we collect an offering?*

**A:** Do NOT pass the plate! Use some type of basket, box, or other collection receptacle for people to leave their tithes, gifts, offerings, and any other materials which would normally go in an offering plate. Those collecting and counting the offering must also use safe practices as they handle everything turned into the church. Continue to encourage some form of electronic giving.

*Q: How do we celebrate Baptism and Holy Communion?*

**A:** Baptism needs to be done one person at a time; parents need to hold their child instead of giving them to the pastor. If you are conducting more than one baptism in a service, then you should use a separate vessel of water for each baptism. Clergy must clean and sanitize their hands between each baptism.

**A:** There is no safe way currently to do communion. If you use the pre-packaged communion elements, then you need to consider how to safely distribute them without contamination.

## Decision Making

*Q: How does the church make the decision of when and how to re-open our facilities?*

**A:** The church's re-launch team should coordinate the planning and preparation for safely opening the facilities to the congregation and new guests. We encourage you not to rush this process. Please be sure you are doing all you can to love your neighbors by keeping them safe.

*Q: What help can the Conference give?*

**A:** Visit the conference website (Congregational Vitality / Re-Launch) to find up-to-date information and resources we have gathered to help you during this unusual season of ministry. We also encourage you to reach out to your district office with questions or concerns.

*Q: Whose advice do we need to follow for safe and healthy gatherings?*

**A:** Follow the lead of the public health officials: CDC, WV Health Department, County Health Department, and your local Municipal Health Department. For example, gatherings above 25 are not currently allowed by the state of WV Department of Health. Although churches may be exempted from some gathering rules by elected leaders, if it is not healthy to gather in groups elsewhere, then why would we want to put people at risk in our churches?

## Vacation Bible School

*Q: When can we schedule our VBS?*

**A:** It is not clear when it will be safe to plan for a VBS. Depending on future guidance from state and local health officials, this type of gathering may be possible late in the summer or as part of a fall break for students, using updated guidelines for gathering children, youth, and adults.

## Youth and Children's Ministry

*Q: How can we gather with children and youth?*

**A:** Most children and youth rooms are not large enough to allow for social distancing. For participants and leaders to sit six feet apart, you may need to use different spaces, larger areas, or limit the number of people who attend. You may need to split larger groups into several smaller groups.

*Q: Can we use the same volunteers/servants?*

**A:** Yes! You will want to ensure you have enough trained and screened servants to break students into smaller groups and still maintain supervision requirements as outlined in your church's Safe Sanctuary policy. You may need to recruit new servants; please be sure they are properly trained and have completed background checks before allowing them to serve

with children and youth. For more information about creating a safe sanctuary policy visit the conference website. ([www.wvumc.org/child-protection-policies/](http://www.wvumc.org/child-protection-policies/))

***Q:** We have a large enough space and enough volunteers/servants, what else do we need to know?*

**A:** If your group moves to a larger space, remember the need to sanitize areas often and after each use. Think of the touchpoints—handles, pulls, tables, chairs, toys, etc. If working with small children, consider wiping down walls and floors with disinfectant.

***Q:** Can we eat together? Is it okay to still give children snacks?*

**A:** If you choose to eat together, we encourage you to offer individually wrapped snacks or meals, and to disinfect all packaging before allowing each person to get their snack/meal. Shared meals and common food containers of any type are not recommended. Remember to practice social distancing while eating!

***Q:** What about playing games?*

**A:** Many children and youth games are based on physical contact. Consider playing games like “Zip, Zap, Zop” and other games which allow for participants to be physically distanced.

***Q:** Do the children, youth, and adults all have to wear masks?*

**A:** The CDC recommends everyone (children, youth, and adults) wearing masks when around other people. Remember, wearing masks is an important way for us to “Do No Harm” around other. Masks are difficult to keep on small children and not recommend for children two years of age and under. Consider age minimums for all activities; for example: “Sunday School is available for children six years of age and older.”