



SNEMN
Guidelines &
Resources for
Reopening

SNE
MINISTRY NETWORK



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Greetings Ministry Leaders,

Like never before in our life time, the church is presented with a great challenge and opportunity to adapt, lead, care, serve, and uphold the promise of Christ's message of hope. It cannot be over stated enough, we are facing unprecedented times.

The reality is, none of us know when the Coronavirus crisis will end, nor what a post-Coronavirus world will look like. However, what we do know, is that it will end and we will face a new season; quite possibly a season like we have never known before. As we move forward in these coming days, it is crucial that we re-engage effectively and confidently.

The following pages are the product of ministry leaders and Networks from around the country. In addition, our SNEMN Presbytery and ministry leaders have added additional content as well.

These guidelines are designed to be a resource to help you lead and direct your ministries. I recognize every church and ministry will have unique circumstances and approach. Across our three states of MA, CT and RI, there will surely be three distinct time tables and regulations. Therefore, these pages present general guidelines and not specific mandates.

The design of this resource is formatted in stages of seasons. We do not anticipate our state regulations to lift immediately. Rather, as they begin to lift in stages they will retract in stages.

Use it, improve it, or cut and paste it to suit the needs of your unique context. At the very least, it is our hope that reading this document with your team, will help you stay out in front of this crisis.

Grace and Peace,

Nick Fatato, Network Superintendent

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#1 Preparing

What are you learning?

As in all ministry, taking time to reflect and learn is critical to going forward. Consider asking these questions:

- What are the top five things you are learning in this season of crisis?
- What are you doing now, that you were not doing before, that you will keep doing?
- What you not doing now, that you were doing, that you will leave behind?

This crisis has changed us forever. It has forced us to be more creative, innovative, and adaptive. It has helped us identify more authentic ways to exist. It has given us a great appreciation for things we once took for granted as churches and ministries. A planned approach to moving into a new season will help you abandon irrelevant practices and embrace new ones.

This crisis will require the church to extend new ministries to the sick, grieving, unemployed, and vulnerable in our cities. Our previous season may not have provided enough margin for the new ministries our future will demand. Therefore, failing to plan will result in irrelevance. Now is a time to innovate and think about the purpose, role, and function, of your church in this new context.

Many churches/ministries have resisted the migration into the virtual world. However, the coronavirus has taken many churches/ministries through a quick immersion into the digital age. The initial move into the digital world was to accommodate online giving and worship services in light of stay-at-home orders. But the coronavirus may be just the tipping point of much more to come. Indeed, this change may be the most profound of all the changes churches will face after the coronavirus is no longer considered a pandemic. A critical question we must each answer is, **how and to what extent will you continue an online ministry presence?**

Community assessment

In order to assess the needs of our communities, you might consider contacting several community leaders to request a short interview by phone to determine the pressing needs of your city/town. This can include a combination of the mayor, city manager, various city council members, fire and police chiefs, command staff, school principals, city departments, neighborhood services, county commissioner, nonprofit leaders, and social services.

Some questions you might ask are:

- What are the most pressing spiritual, personal, and social needs people have in our town/city/neighborhood?
- What are the five (5) greatest needs our city/neighborhood is facing right now?
- How can we support the existing work our local government agencies are doing?
- What gaps need to be filled in this area that only a faith-based work can do?
- What vulnerable population in our community is underserved and how?
- Who in our town/city is effectively meeting COVID-19 needs?
- What local resources are available to help our citizens that we can share with our congregation and community?

Then evaluate how you might strategically align your church/ministry to help in these areas as well as others you may need to jump in and get “on-the-job training” for.

Phasing

The ‘re-open’ of public spaces will be gradual. It will be more like a dimmer switch than a on/off switch. This will require careful planning. If ministries go too fast, they will have to reverse course. If they go too slow, they may never get momentum. The opening will be a careful dance with many factors to consider.

Be careful not to set hard timelines. There really is no way to know exactly what restrictions will be lifted and how they will be lifted. Setting a “we will be open” date can create pressure to make something happen that is not possible. It can also discourage people in your ministry as the time line keeps changing. A better idea might be to say, “we are going to remain closed for public gatherings until [insert date] and then evaluate at that time”. This affirms you are preparing and moving toward re-opening.



Are you making spiritual deposits into your soul that can cover the leadership checks you are writing?

Prayer

How can you mobilize people in prayer for God's miraculous intervention for those affected by the virus in your church and community.

Consider crafting intentional prayer focuses for:

- People who have lost jobs
- People who tested positive
- Business owners you know
- Your church's outreach in the community
- Those most vulnerable to the virus
- Governmental leaders (including the President and governor)
- Health care professionals
- Scientists, researchers, and the vaccine
- Those financially impacted
- Those mourning the loss of loved ones
- Churches to be ready to minister
- Pastors as they lead
- The hurting, homeless, and hopeless
- Those far from God to come close and know Christ.

Leader Care

Ministry leaders cannot maintain the fast pace, emotional engagement, continuous innovation, and instant availability that the crisis initially demanded. Important questions to consider are:

- What spiritual disciplines need to be strengthened?
- What boundaries need to be determined?
- What expectations are both reasonable and sustainable?

Leading in crises requires you to write emotional, physical, and spiritual checks every day. Are you making spiritual deposits into your soul that can cover the leadership checks you are writing? How are your marriage and family relationships? How are you processing the many shifting emotions?

What type of emotional/spiritual support will you need to include for yourself (i.e. peer support, counseling, coaching, etc.)?

[See Resource Section for Counseling and Mental Health Resources.](#)

#2 Opening Up

Practical Guidelines for Opening Churches from COVID-19

These guidelines are recommendations for churches/ministries who choose to begin meeting again inside their church buildings. Church leaders must understand that whenever they choose to open their facilities, they will now have a greater social responsibility for keeping their congregation safe. Meeting restrictions will most likely change and even be inconsistent in ways, similar to how they were implemented. Meeting restrictions will most likely change, adapt, expand and contract depending on the containment of the virus. Therefore, these guidelines are designed to be adapted to your local context in real-time as you continue to lead through each phase. See [Resource section](#) and [Appendix](#) for additional information.



Social Distancing

Decide. Before moving to in-person gatherings, check with your church's insurer, the latest mandates from your state Governor, federal government, health professionals, and CDC recommendations.

Thorough Communication. Post Social Distancing reminders on doors, video screens, and make announcements. *Do not hand out printed bulletins or other items.* ([See Appendix \(Principles, Protocols, and Communication for Re-Engaging Public Worship\)](#))

Limit Contact. Churches should encourage families to sit together as a group, but be seated at least 6 ft. from other families. Hugs and handshakes should be strongly discouraged for the foreseeable future.

Reduce Capacity. Churches should try to limit their attendance to 20-30% of their seating capacity. Adding additional service times on Saturday night or on Sundays and opening fellowship halls or balconies for seating with video screens are a possible solution. An alternative service time for the elderly and "at-risk" community may be necessary.

Suspend Groups/Classes. It is recommended that churches not hold Sunday School or small groups for the foreseeable future; and not hold any special dinners or events that would bring a crowd, until it is safe and acceptable.

It is recommended that churches not offer nursery or children's church ministries as well during early reopening. A good standard would be to hold off opening these ministries until your state lifts the ban on childcare facilities.

Stagger Entry and Exit. Churches should consider staggering dismissals (eg. Dismiss by section or alternating rows) to eliminate crowding. If a church is holding multiple services, it is recommended that congregants be asked to leave using a different exit door in order to maintain the cleanliness of the entrance.



Cleanliness

Offer Sanitization. Offer plenty of hand sanitizer in various locations and encourage usage. If possible, provide cleaning wipes and face masks

Deep clean your entire church. Assess where germs may be transferred. Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, and microphones. Have volunteers do a thorough cleaning after each service and disinfect hard surfaces every 15 minutes while the building is occupied.

Communicate Preparedness. Tell people through flyers on the doors, email, and social media about how the church/ministry has prepared for their arrival. Be sure to use the words “non-touch worship experience” or something similar.

Shorten Exposure. Consider shortening service times to 45 minutes or less in order to cut down the exposure time and to decrease the number of people needing to use the rest room.

Limit Transfer Surfaces. Assess the variety of transfer surfaces used within a service. Consider how you might limit the usage or prepare other means. Some ideas can be found below:

- It is suggested to not “Pass the Offering Plate” from person to person. Some proposed solutions are the use of a “giving box” at the entrances or promoting online giving. Ushers are encouraged to wear gloves when counting the money.
- Minimize microphone passing on stage and sanitize microphones that may disassemble.
- If your church offers communion, it is recommended to use individual communion packets distributed at a table upon entry
- We recommend withholding coffee stations and/or cafes and group meals at this time.

Leadership & Administration

Administrative policy. Adjust to and set criteria for the return of administrative scenarios such as: return to work, staff meetings, board meetings, and other such meetings.

Staff/leadership job descriptions. Does rebounding from this crisis require adjustments to existing staff/leadership/volunteer job descriptions? A few leaders may be forced into temporary bi-vocational ministry. If so, put the what, how, and when on paper. It is hard to solve problems that are yet to be articulated.

Sustaining online presence. Dates and strategies should be determined to maintain and sustain online services and distanced spiritual care for vulnerable populations. It would also be wise to find ways for your people to connect with your new virtual community watching online.

Rework budget. Revisit your church budget to make sure it can finance the needs and realities of this new season. Some items will need to be eliminated, reallocated, or added in light of COVID-19. Following are a few questions that may help you begin that process:

- What are the basic necessities to operate our current facilities and pay staff?
- What new streams of revenue should we explore?
- How much of our cash reserves did we exhaust?
- Do we have an understanding of how unemployment has affected our community
- Does that reflect our budget?
- How are we going to build something into the budget to care for these in need?
- How can we get 2-3 months of emergency funds saved to operate in the event of another outbreak or emergency?
- Are we prepared with a solid, reasonably priced online giving company?
- What ministry areas are producing and need more funding?
- What was stopped during the pandemic and does not need to restart?
- What areas are receiving funding but are not producing?
- What do we find to be less valuable after COVID-19? Does it need to continue?
- What new ministry outlets do we want to continue?
- If our budget is solid, how can we support or care for newer or struggling churches
- Are we funding anything that does not align with the vision to move forward?
- How are we thanking those who are generous?

Prepare for the next phase. Federal and state governments will gradually increase the maximum number of participants allowed in group events. It would be wise for you to think through those stages now and what ministries will be impacted and how.

Others will be challenged and eager to reach out to others.

Encourage those who are ready and willing to engage.

Deploying Outreach

Identify high potential volunteers. Some people will turn inward and need to be ministered to. Others will be challenged and eager to reach out to others. Encourage those who are ready and willing to engage.

Dispatch ministry teams. Dispatch able and willing people to serve the town/city or other organizations when restrictions are lifted:

- Serving the sick
- Weathering financial need and uncertainty
- Launching virtual small groups
- Loving and serving their community well

Financial empowerment. Resource those facing negative economic ramifications (job loss, position reduction, or transfer). This may involve:

- Creating an online jobs-needed list and make available to your Facebook group or page on your church website.
- Résumé center where people in your church can get an idea of the qualifications of those needing work in order to better recommend them to others.
- Create an employment need prayer list.
- Send a weekly email of encouragement from the pastoral staff to those needing work.
- Create a system to provide letters of recommendation from influential people in your church.
- If you do not have a benevolence policy, you will need a simple one to help you better steward your limited resources.

3 Resources

[CMN and Act2 ReLaunch Kit:](https://covid19.ag.org/en/Resources/FR-Church-Leadership/Church-Relaunch-Kit)

<https://covid19.ag.org/en/Resources/FR-Church-Leadership/Church-Relaunch-Kit>

[AG Covid- 19 Resources:](https://covid19.ag.org)

<https://covid19.ag.org>

[Vanderbloemen Group \(Re-Opening Resources for Churches of Various Sizes\):](https://www.vanderbloemen.com/reopening-church)

<https://www.vanderbloemen.com/reopening-church>

[Whitehouse Opening Up America Again Guidelines:](https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica>

[Made to Flourish:](http://www.madetoflourish.org)

<http://www.madetoflourish.org>

[Ed Stetzer's COVID-19 Website:](https://coronavirusandthechurch.com)

<https://coronavirusandthechurch.com>

[Christianity Today:](https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/what-relaunching-church-might-look-like-over-next-312-month.html)

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/what-relaunching-church-might-look-like-over-next-312-month.html>

[Pastor Resiliency Resources \(Soul care resources for ministers\):](https://coronavirusandthechurch.com/resiliency)

<https://coronavirusandthechurch.com/resiliency>

[Center for Disease Control:](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Counseling, Coaching and Mental Health Resources:

[Christian Counselors Network:](http://www.christiancounselors.network)

<http://www.christiancounselors.network>

[Pastor Wellness Resources](http://PastorWellnessResources.org)

<http://PastorWellnessResources.org>

[Zoom Fatigue:](https://curtthompsonmd.com/a-body-of-work/)

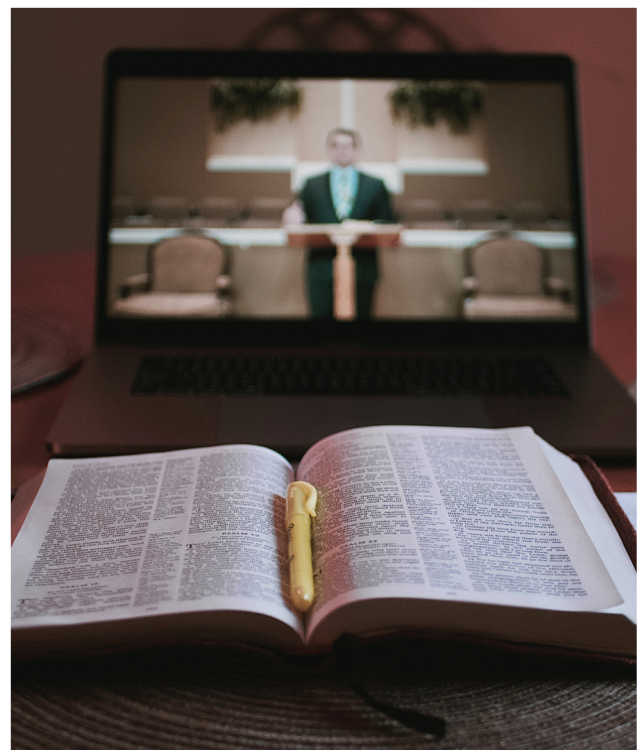
<https://curtthompsonmd.com/a-body-of-work/>

[American Christian Counseling Association:](https://connect.aacc.net/?search_type=distance)

https://connect.aacc.net/?search_type=distance

[Clearpoint Coaching:](http://clearpointcoaching.com)

<http://clearpointcoaching.com>



Appendix

Sample Template for Re-entry

Note: This is a sample or template. It serves as an example of a re-entry strategy, not a recommendation.

- **Initial Phase:** Leaders (or Invited Members) in Sanctuary Only

Possible Marker: After Stay at Home orders are lifted.

A. Before first public gatherings

1. Check with Church's Insurer, Latest from Governor, etc.
2. Develop tentative re-entry schedule with team of leaders. Questions: What is legal? What is helpful? What is tasteful?
3. Communicate preparations and expectations via Facebook, website, video, and email
 - a. No youth or children's classes; no nursery
 - b. Encourage CDC Recommendations (wear masks, washed hands, social distancing, etc.)
 - c. Advertise adjustments below
 - d. Insist elderly, ill, and at-risk groups to stay home
 - e. Continue online/alternate worship experience
4. Post Signage of Protocols outside and inside

B. Sunday morning before service/gathering

1. Sanitation Teams begin wiping bathrooms, door handles, every 15 minutes
2. Greeters present while standing 6-10 feet from doors
3. Prop open or hold open all doors to limit touching door handles
4. Coffee stations and cafes should remain closed at all times
5. Supply of hand sanitizer and masks on way in, if available
6. Signs on Kids Rooms and Nursery with those doors locked
7. Remove or rope off 50% of seating or every 3rd pew
8. Ushers maintain distance while guiding people to seats
9. Live streaming to other room(s) as needed

C. During service/gathering

1. No youth or children's classes; (children stay with family)
2. Do not direct people to shake hands, hug, etc., as you might normally do
3. Only family/household unit may sit together
4. Announce and observe latest social distancing protocols
5. Platform participants model social distancing while avoiding sharing mics, instruments, stands, etc.

6. Service length should be shorter than normal (60 minutes or less)
7. Minimize need for restrooms
8. Consider emphasis on group experience such as prayer and worship
9. No offering plates passed; reference online giving or provide stationary open receptacle without handles
10. Utilize screens or apps instead of passing around hard copy bulletins and connection cards
11. Pre-packaged communion elements received at entry
12. Prayer for needs in a general sense (no laying on of hands or holding hands, etc.)

D. After gathering

1. Structured dismissals (by rows or sections) allowing people to leave in smaller groups and go outside (no congregating in lobby).
2. Consider positioning video camera outside to later post and share uplifting stories on church's Facebook page or website

• **Intermediary Phase:** Staggered Gatherings in Sanctuary Only

Possible Marker: After initial phase services are running smoothly

- A. Continue Initial Phase protocols above, possibly modified as appropriate
- B. One Service for Households A–M; Another for Households N–Z
Alternate every other Sunday, or use this season to launch second (or additional) service
- C. More groups for larger churches (A–G, H–M, N–T, U–Z)
- D. Allow extra time for sanitizing between services
- E. Still no youth, children, small groups, etc.; no nursery
- F. Consider alternative service/location for healthy individuals age 65 and older

Children's Phase: As per Phase 2 White House/state guidelines

Possible Marker: When the State Approves Community Daycares to open

- A. Observe Phase 1 and Phase 2 Protocols (above)
- B. Nursery resumes; other in-person ministries resume based on comfort level of leaders, pastor/board approval
- C. Consider alternative service/location for those who may be at greater risk

Final Phase/Standard Services: As per Phase 3 White House/state guidelines

Possible Marker: When State Lifts Restrictions on Large Group Gatherings

- A. Service schedules cautiously return to normal
- B. Observe updated CDC, federal, and state guidelines as warranted
- C. Maintain readiness to return to prior phases as warranted

Principles, Protocols, and Communication for Reopening Public Worship

Prudence suggests that the manner in which a church begins to re-engage with public worship services should remain in thoughtful alignment with the guidelines provided by national, state, and local health officials.

Three key areas should be considered in relation to how a church should re-engage.

1. The church must consider the **guiding principles** which govern the transition.
2. A church must attend to the **protocols and procedures** that will govern the re-entry.
3. A church must consider an appropriate **communication strategy** for enumerating these measures to the congregation.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles serve as the lens through which decisions can be made. It is easy in seasons like this one to allow urgency to play a greater role than it should when making good, sound choices. The following are some of the factors that should be considered.

- Public witness of the church
- The prayerful wisdom of your team of leaders
- The safety of the church
- The particular needs and circumstances of your local congregation
- The plans of other churches in the community and state
- The guidance of your insurance company and legal cCounsel
- The latest recommendations/orders from the CDC and governmental authorities



Protocols and Procedures

As you look to create a strategy for public worship services, you need to consider several factors when preparing your protocols. First, you need to review the timeline or phases of the return. We will utilize the guidelines provided by the White House as a framework. Be sure to consult the latest recommendations from local governmental leaders as you build out your church's strategy.

The White House's current strategy for re-opening is set up in three phases:

1. In phase **one**, churches are permitted to operate under strict physical distancing protocols. Additionally, entities like daycares or camps should remain closed. While the current recommendations do not define "strict" clearly, it can be assumed that the strictest of standards should be followed given that individuals are encouraged to avoid participating in groups that are larger than ten individuals without appropriate distancing requirements being met. Additionally, it should be highlighted that vulnerable individuals are recommended to shelter-in-place during this phase.
2. In phase **two**, the physical distancing requirements are relaxed to moderate. Daycares will be permitted to reopen. Individuals are encouraged to avoid crowds of more than 50 if social distancing is unattainable. Vulnerable populations are encouraged to continue to shelter-in-place during this phase. Daycares and camps can resume in this phase.
3. In phase **three**, public gatherings can operate with only limited distancing guidelines. There is no crowd size defined in this phase. However, individuals are encouraged to avoid large crowds if possible. Those who are vulnerable are allowed to resume normal activities while taking normal precautions.

Additionally, just as protocols and procedures will look differently from one state to the next and from one community to the next, so they will need to look differently from one church to the next. A church with hundreds of people in each service will most certainly need to take a different approach than a church with less than 50.

Some churches are already planning to resume public services weeks or even months later than others. Realizing there is no "one-size fits all" fix for re-entry, a generalized template is provided below. Each local team of leaders should prayerfully consider the approach that seems best suited for their congregation and their community.

Communication Strategy

With your team of leaders, outline a strategy for how your church will communicate your upcoming plans. Keep in mind the following perspectives:

- Carefully consider whatever you post on social media since it will need to be viewed through the lens of what the watching world will see. The unchurched may not readily understand your enthusiasm for reconvening in group settings.
- Guidelines and recommendations are being updated continually. It will be important for your people to be fully informed of your church's plans and protocols via email, website, and phone calls.
- Some in your church will be thrilled to meet again, as soon as possible. Others will feel that a "wait and see" approach is more fitting. Choose your words as carefully as possible when conveying your plans.
- As sensitively as possible, help families with young children, senior citizens, those who are at risk, etc., to understand why others in your congregation will reasonably have concerns about their attendance. For example, some parents will be disappointed and concerned if other young children come near their own while in the church service.

[FOR UPDATES & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES VISIT: SNEMN.COM](http://SNEMN.COM)

