



Date: 5/15/2020

MEMO: Guidance for Facilitating Safe In-Person Worship Services

On Wednesday, May 13, 2020, the WI Supreme Court overturned the state's Emergency Order #28: Safer at Home. With this ruling, churches now have the right to hold worship services and operate as usual.

Even though the Safer at Home Order is gone, the virus remains. In an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19, we are respectfully requesting that church leadership and congregation members voluntarily follow safe social distancing practices.

At this time, the Clark County Health Department (CCHD) is urging ALL residents do ALL of the following:

- Stay at home if you are sick
- Minimize close physical contact with those outside of your household
- Minimize travel, especially within and beyond our state borders
- Wear a fabric face covering or a mask if you must be in public
- Maintain 6-foot distances with others whenever possible
- Minimize congregating in groups of any size
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid touching your face

The CCHD strongly advises places of worship to continue offering online/virtual services, but supports the return of in-person worship services.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches recommends a "Model for Returning to Church" which aligns with the phases of the *Badger Bounce Back*. To find this information, please visit the following website link:

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>

In addition to the guidance noted above, please review the following recommendations taken from the Diocese of LaCrosse while planning for in-person worship services:

Preparations Before Worship:

1. Senior worship leaders or those with pre-existing health conditions are encouraged to lead church services through virtual means.
2. Worship leaders whom lead church services at multiple locations should consider leading only one in-person church service per day.
3. Attendance at each individual service should be limited to 25 percent of occupancy with proper social distancing, unless the local or state authorities have implemented a stricter order. Worship leaders, ushers, or other volunteers should not allow more than the permitted number to enter the place of worship.
4. Signage should be placed on entrance doors reminding anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the place of worship.
5. Limit the number of entrances being used and designate an entrance door and an exit door, where possible.
6. Practice social distancing at a minimum of 6 feet between people not living in the same household.
7. Seat household members together with a minimum of every other pew between family groups.
8. Hymnals, prayer cards or other paper resources should be removed from pews. Printed worship aids are discouraged. If paper worship aids are used, they should be limited to one page and people should be directed to take them with them after the church service. If worship aids are left in a pew, they should be collected and destroyed after each service; they should not be used for the next service.
9. Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances and exits.
10. In an effort to reduce exposure, have only essential persons to assist with worship. If possible, limit the number of ushers, greeters, altar servers and/or volunteers needed for each service.
11. Choirs should not be used.

12. Worship leaders and ushers should wear masks and should not make physical contact when greeting congregation members.
13. Those who prepare communion elements should carefully wash their hands prior to touching the breads and pouring the wine; a facemask and gloves are recommended.
14. Holy water and baptismal fonts should remain empty and unused.

During Worship Service:

1. For a monetary collection, baskets or other appropriate containers could be placed at church exits or elsewhere in the building for people to drop envelopes or donations. As an alternative, baskets with long handles are allowed; collection baskets should not be passed person-to-person. Ushers taking the collection should wear masks and gloves. Ushers should immediately wash or sanitize their hands after the collection.
2. Hand shaking and/or hugging should not occur.
3. The congregation members could be reminded that at this time no one is forced to receive communion.
4. All communion officiants should wash/sanitize their hands before and after the distribution of holy communion.
5. Congregation members should be reminded to observe the 6-foot distance between themselves while in line to receive holy communion.
6. Encourage communion to be received only in the hand.

After Worship Service:

1. Frequently touched surfaces in the church (pews, pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.) should be cleaned and sanitized per CDC recommendations after every service. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
2. Non-essential gatherings should be suspended, including Children's Sermon and post-worship service social gatherings/refreshments.
3. Offertory money should be placed in a tamper-evident bag and kept in a safe place for at least 3 days before being counted.
4. Restrooms should be cleaned between services.

Suggestions for the Worship Leader's Discretion:

- All those as defined by the health department as more vulnerable (i.e. 60+ years of age, those with compromised immune systems, those with underlying health conditions, etc.) should be encouraged to stay home.
- Mass attendance could be organized in some way:
 - Designate service times by household name (A to H, Service 1; I to O, Service 2; etc.);
 - Provide a sign-up system either on the church website or by calling the church office;
 - Assign a service time per registered family;
 - To meet occupancy requirements, registration is by designated time--no walk-in attendance.
- Ushers could direct the communion line and markings should be placed on the floor to preserve social distancing.
- If possible, hand sanitizer should be available in the aisle(s) for use by people prior to receiving communion.
- Gathering area tables and chairs should be put into storage so as not to invite people to use them.
- Entrance doors should be propped open to limit contact with door handles, or else ushers should hold open doors.
- The use of familiar hymns is encouraged to limit any need for a worship aid.
- Directions for dismissal after service should be offered by the worship leader to provide an orderly exit with proper social distancing. Ushers can release the congregation pew-by-pew, or similar.

Please be aware that guidelines may change in the upcoming days or weeks. Should any new information become available, we will keep you informed.

The health and safety of all community members remains our highest priority. The CCHD continues to isolate and conduct investigations with individuals who test positive for COVID-19.

Thank you for your continued cooperation.

Clark County Health Department
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