

Regathering Guidelines for Congregations

Updated July 14, 2020



The question of when and how to begin regathering as churches is now in front of us as various provincial governments have granted permission with restrictions. This news comes to us amidst the usual summer vacation season. As we prepare thoughtfully for this regathering we realize that “church” in a COVID-19 world will present some constraints. This will call for creativity, planning, committed effort and healthy conversation. **It is important to remember that simply because you can begin meeting again does not necessarily mean that your must. Do not reopen until you are ready.**

As a denomination we want to give the following directives regarding regathering:

1. **Reopen with grace.** Clearly communicate that a person’s faith and loyalty to their congregation will not be judged by their presence or absence at the reopening of services. Shaming of fellow believers is unacceptable! In our conversations it is healthy for us to have dissenting opinions as we discern together what to do. It is important for people to be heard in this conversation and for us to always remember that at the end of the day we are brothers and sisters in Christ. A spiritual family in Jesus.
2. **Churches must follow all government restrictions and protocols.** These directives are clearly published on the various provincial web-sites.
3. Churches **may not regather for public services without first dialoguing with the Executive Director.** Our objective is not to be controlling but to be satisfied that a well thought out and workable plan is in place in your setting for regathering. This plan should **at least** address the following: How will your seating allow for physical distancing? How many people can gather at one time? Will you need multiple gatherings? How will you handle it if too many people show up for a service? What about a special service for seniors / at risk persons? What *can you do well* and what will your congregation accept?
4. One size does not fit all when it comes to regathering. In this case it is an advantage to be smaller. **We are strongly suggesting that any church with an average pre-Covid attendance of more than 100 should hold off regathering until at least August 16th**

and perhaps consider using the last few Sundays of summer as a soft launch time.

Churches of under 100 may regather for services but should feel under no compulsion to do so. Of course a second wave of COVID-19 would cause us all to have to re-think things yet again. For churches that do not resume public services over the summer we suggest considering meeting in small groups, organizing "viewing parties", and hosting small outdoor fellowship gatherings as a transitional strategy. Youth gatherings may be held as well as long as proper protocols are followed.

5. **Train and re-train** your workers on new post-COVID-19 protocols and procedures.
6. Churches **should only run a separate children's ministry** when they can demonstrate they have created a workable plan to keep children and volunteers safe. We have prepared a worksheet with important questions to ask.
7. In most areas **congregational singing is discouraged** as it presents a greater risk of spreading Covid-19. If you are going to sing then people must wear a mask (in some areas mask wearing is mandatory anyway). The Pastor and Worship Team do not need to wear a mask but must remain at least 12 feet from any people in the audience and worship team members must physical distance.
8. **Be very careful about serving food and beverages.** Consider encouraging people to bring their own refreshments for now. If food is served in congregant settings then guidelines that apply to the food service industry will apply.
9. **Commit to an ongoing online ministry.** Some people will just not come back until there is a vaccine. Remember they are part of your congregation as well. Consider what it means to be both a live and an online church.
10. **Continue to minister to needs in the community.** During these days we have found new ways of bringing blessing to their community. Keep it going!
11. **Provide people with ways to give.** Passing the plate may be a thing of the past.
12. **Over communicate with your people** about what is going on.

Above all - remember - a kite rises higher against the wind. May God help you and your church to rise to the opportunity of this most unique time we are living through together.

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