

## Guidance for Davidson County Religious Communities

The prudence and cooperation of our faith-based communities has been an important part of the progress we have made in our efforts against COVID-19. While we continue to recognize the hardship placed on persons of faith who desire to worship freely and in community, we also recognize the health risks presented by any physical assemblies, including worship gatherings or related assemblies, during the pandemic. To be clear, while we are taking measured steps to open up Nashville, the Covid-19 pandemic is far from over and will be with us for the foreseeable future.

We are particularly mindful that many persons of faith, including our most vulnerable, deem communal religious observance to be essential (and perhaps obligatory), regardless of the health risk to themselves and others. As a result, while we urge congregations to continue to refrain from communal worship services, we are aware that some will choose to resume such services.

We have been asked to provide guidance to those congregations that wish to physically gather for worship. We are mindful that such gatherings are especially inadvisable for persons over age 65 and those with certain underlying health conditions. Written with our valued assemblies in mind, these guidelines are based on recommendations by the CDC and our local Health Department.

- 1. General Guidelines:** Due to the unique relationship between religious communities and their congregants, these communities have a heightened responsibility to protect their congregants who will deem religious services essential despite the risk such gatherings pose to their personal health and the health of those with whom they come into contact. As a result, we urge religious congregations to:
  - Continue online worship services.
  - Plan on a maximum capacity of 1 person per 200 square feet of space. This ratio applies to each worship space, teaching space, and other gathering space.
  - Urge congregants/members with children under age 2 (who are deemed too young to wear facial coverings) and those over age 65 to continue to shelter at home and to take advantage of online services.
  - Urge all vulnerable congregants and those who have contact with vulnerable populations to continue to refrain from attending in-person religious services.
  - Demonstrate leadership by always wearing facial coverings in public. Require that congregants wear face coverings while arriving, attending, or departing from services.
- 2. Communication with your Congregants.** Please communicate often with your congregants both before and after you re-open. It is strongly recommended that you include your social distancing policy and cleaning protocols on your website, on social media, and by your other usual means of communication to assist your congregants in determining when it is safe for them to attend.
- 3. Signage.** Be sure that you have signage throughout your facility that complies with the Health Department order regarding [signage](#). Staff or congregants should be reminded of the evolving COVID-19 symptoms and should be urged to stay at home or leave if they are experiencing any symptoms. Congregants should be urged to notify their religious community if they are COVID-positive and attended worship service or other events at that location in the preceding 14 days or as recommended by their healthcare provider or the Health Department.
- 4. Cleaning.** Before a religious space reopens, these safety precautions should be in place and clearly communicated to your congregants and staff:

- Hand sanitizer or sanitizing materials, compliant with CDC standards, should be available to everyone in common areas. Signage and/or staff should be deployed to encourage the use of hand sanitizer.
- Regularly sanitize and disinfect high touchpoint areas (e.g., doors, seating, lecterns, microphones, altars, trash receptacles).
- Provide enhanced sanitizing and disinfecting every evening after the organization closes for the day.
- All sanitizing and disinfecting should be performed with CDC-compliant cleaning products and protocols.
- While temperature checks of congregants are up to each congregation, if you choose to do this, thermometers should be purchased.

**5. Changes to Consider.** Throughout the course of this pandemic, you will need to stay abreast of recommendations from the Health Department. Current recommendations include:

- Wearing of facial coverings and gloves by greeters. Greeters should avoid contact with entering participants, but can assist with social distancing protocols and keeping doors propped open and/or clean.
- Seating together congregants only who share living spaces.
- Establishing a social distancing plan (with signage) that addresses:
  - Keeping congregants/families six feet apart from others.
  - Removing or blocking off seating to comply with capacity guidelines.
  - Establishing ingress and egress protocols that comply with social distancing norms. Organizations should consider dismissing congregants by zone in order to avoid close proximity at exits.
  - Offering more services/shorter services to reduce crowding.
- Storing away hymnals, religious ye, and other shared religious items.
- Using collection boxes at entrances/exits in lieu of collection baskets or plates.
- Focusing on worship services and avoiding social gatherings.
- Having a plan for weddings, baptisms, funerals, and other religious ceremonies that comply with social distancing guidelines.