

## RETHINK

## RETURN

## RELAUNCH

### Rethinking Church as we return to our buildings and relaunch our ministries

#### Considerations for New England Conference United Methodist Communities of Faith

People of faith are weary from the COVID-19 pandemic that affects us all. And while we miss doing and being “the church” the way we are used to, we also know that relaunching our religious practices will take careful planning and creativity. Your conference leaders are here to assist you in that work, and we will update these resources as more information becomes available. As we begin to look ahead and consider federal, state and local loosening of the standards for gathering together, we want to provide some guidelines for when that time is right in your context. We do not know when that will be, and each congregation will need to carefully examine their own context following federal, state, and local benchmarks. We encourage you to develop a working team of leaders in your community to guide your own church through this process.

#### **The time to prepare is now**

While we are still far from opening wide the doors of our church buildings, now is the time to prepare for when that day comes. You will need to consider many things prior to welcoming people into your space so that we do not do further harm and risk lives. Here are some questions to consider:

- Who should serve on your team to develop plans and protocols for reentry?
- Have you read the CDC guidelines and your state’s plan for phased reentry?
- Who are the at-risk people in your community of participants, and what proportion of the total do they comprise? Are any of them staff and/or volunteers? How does that impact your planning?
- How will you communicate your plans with your members, online community, etc.?
- Will you continue to offer worship for those who are vulnerable and/or afraid to return to worship? Will you give them permission (and encourage) them to stay at home? And if so, how will you continue to be in ministry with them?
- As we move through state and local guidance and restrictions, how will you limit attendance at worship and other events? What are the benchmarks you need to reach before meeting in groups of 10, 25, 50, 100?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping in family groups sitting 6 feet apart?
- How will you ensure safe physical distancing in your buildings? What will you need to do to doorways, walkways, sanctuaries and meeting rooms? How will you direct traffic as people enter/leave?
- How will you guide small group gatherings that have been on-line? Do you encourage them to continue their on-line presence or encourage them to come back to the facility?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection of communal spaces following worship, small groups, or meetings?
- How will you update your building usage agreements after COVID-19?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you respond pastorally to them? How will you do a more intensive cleaning? What is

your communication plan to notify those who may have been exposed? And what are your responsibilities to notify local officials?

- How will your budget need to change to adapt to new needs for staffing, for cleaning, for changes in giving?
- Do you have the necessary cleaning supplies and washing stations recommended by the CDC? Are you able to sustain an ample supply?
- What will need to change in your worship setting to eliminate touching shared items (like offering plates, microphones, attendance pads, communion elements)?
- What common practices will need to change (singing, greeting, passing peace, children's time, etc.)?
- How will this affect childcare and children's programming?
- What policies will you establish for weddings and funerals? For visitation? Meetings?
- What happens if you have to close your doors again? How will you communicate your plans?

These are only some of the many questions that you need to consider. Please remember that as states begin to "reopen" this does not mean an "all-clear" for churches to return to the way we were before COVID-19.

We need to proceed with great caution and be sure that we act responsibly and faithfully to provide safe worship experiences for our members, staff, and volunteers.

This questionnaire is a tool for your church leadership to use to begin the conversation and to serve as a catalyst for your planning. Additionally, we will provide a set of "best practice" guidelines for you to follow as you rethink church after COVID-19.

Please check the NEAC resource page: [www.neumc.org/COVID19](http://www.neumc.org/COVID19) for those guidelines and more tools to equip your mission and ministry.