

Before We Gather

Planning for Social Distancing

As your ministry gears up to resume normal church operations, you may be curious about how to use social distancing to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. You can learn more about the benefits of social distancing (avoiding close contact; keeping 6 feet apart when in public) in this article from the CDC: [social distancing recommendations](#).

What does social distancing look like at church? We've compiled a list of areas to consider so your team can begin making plans. If your ministry does decide to use social distancing measures, communication will be key. Be sure to let your attendees, staff, and volunteers know about any changes and what to expect in advance.

Social Distancing in the Parking Lot

Questions

- What could social distancing look like in your parking lot?
- Is your parking lot usually a place where your attendees gather before or after services?
- Is your parking lot usually filled for each worship service? Half filled?
- Do you have security staff, church staff, or volunteers that usually monitor the parking lot? Will they need to be trained to do anything differently?

Ideas:

- Directing vehicles to alternating sides of the lot can help keep space between attendees as they arrive and walk from their cars to the church.
- Filling the closest parking spots to the entrance first and then continuing out to the farthest spots helps keep traffic flowing and gives people space as they walk to the entrance.
- Leaving every other space open can help maintain distance between attendees as they arrive and as they leave.
- Using arrows, signage, cones, or cordons helps guide people from their cars to the designated entrances of your building.

Social Distancing in the Entrance/Lobby

Questions

- Which door or doors would you like people to enter through?
- Which doors will they exit through?
- Are there areas in the entrance or lobby where groups of people tend to gather before, after, or during your services?
- Is your entrance/lobby staffed by security, greeters, or staff before, during, or after your services? Do they need additional training?
- Will you need to limit the number of people that can be in the restroom at one time?

Ideas

- Directing people through the outer doors instead of the center doors of your entry can help keep people separated.
- Training your greeters to verbally welcome attendees and direct them to the sanctuary can help keep the entry way from becoming congested.
- Planning for sanctuary ingress and egress accommodates for one-way traffic flow in and one-way flow out, which helps to maintain distancing among people.
- Using signage, floor decals or tape, cones, or cordons provides a visual guide to help direct people through the entrance to the sanctuary.
- Limiting areas where people usually gather in the lobby may include delaying the opening of bookstores and coffee or refreshments.
- Temporarily removing café tables or blocking off the resource center, bookstore, or refreshment area can help eliminate areas that may require extra cleaning between services.

Social Distancing in the Sanctuary

Questions

- How many people does your sanctuary normally accommodate? Will this work with social distancing measures in place?
- How will you fill the rows and how will you dismiss to help with social distancing?
- What signage do you need?
- Can the worship team give reminders from the stage about how you will dismiss?

Ideas

- Remove chairs or block pews to maintain a minimum of 6 feet between worshipers who aren't immediate family members.
- Train ushers to fill seats from front to back, alternating sides to further maintain distance.
- Dismissing row by row, from back to front, alternating sides, can help maintain distance.
- Encourage attendees to arrive earlier than normal to avoid a large rush of people into the sanctuary at the last minute.
- If your ministry has the technology, utilize classrooms to host smaller groups of people who can watch a livestream of the service.
- Some ministries may want to approach inviting people to church by hosting small groups first, before moving to larger gatherings for Sunday services. Some ministries may only want to hold worship services without additional classes or children's ministry activities.

Combine Personal Precautions with Social Distancing

Reminding attendees about everyday precautions they should take and talking about steps you are taking regarding sanitation can help reduce your attendees' apprehension and protect against the spread of illness.

Questions

- Health experts recommend that individuals wear a mask when they go out in public to reduce the spread of the disease. Does your ministry plan to encourage the use of masks for attendees or staff? Stay informed of the [CDC guidelines](#).
- Will you have hand sanitizer available throughout your building?
- Are restroom supplies fully stocked?

Ideas

- Use signage and make announcements before service to remind attendees about [CDC guidance](#) regarding everyday precautions like handwashing, social distancing, and cough etiquette.
- The [CDC offers](#) several posters that could help you communicate.
- Additional signage on your entrance door about following the ministry's safety practices, including a short assume-the-risk statement, may be helpful.