

As our state reaches its anticipated peak number of COVID 19 cases and governments talk about reopening businesses that had been closed in order to slow the spread of the virus, we begin to think about when we will gather once again for worship and other activities in our churches.

Our church recognizes that the well-being of our members and our neighbors is our primary concern. Therefore, we want to approach reopening our churches carefully and with good planning.

The World Health Organization recommends that “schools, workplaces and other essential places have established preventive measures” and that “communities are fully educated, engaged and empowered to live under a new normal.” Congregation leaders can begin now to establish procedures and educate members and others in a healthy, safe resumption of activities. We recommend a gradual return to gatherings under clear guidelines and intentional monitoring.

Here are some things that congregational leaders should keep in mind as they begin planning for the reopening of churches, when the appropriate time arrives:

- Make sure that there are ample supplies for hygiene – soap and water, disposable hand towels, sanitizer, disinfectant, etc.
- Develop a plan for cleaning gathering spaces
- Determine whether to limit the number of people who can gather – and how they should be seated
- Assign separate doors for entry and exit
- Develop a plan for informing members and others of the guidelines, as well as how to monitor and ensure compliance
- Give thought to how communion elements will be distributed (current guidance discourages practices such as intinction, common cup, and placing the bread into the hand or mouth)
- Replace physical contact in the Passing of the Peace with bowing, nodding, or waving
- Consider whether you will ask attendees to wear masks during worship
- Develop a plan for other congregational meetings and gatherings, including the rules that outside groups will follow when using the building and whether communal meals will be allowed
- Have a process in place for notifying members/attendees if someone in the community becomes ill with COVID-19

We thank our colleague, Pastor Craig Miller, on the staff of the Upper Susquehanna Synod for pulling together and sharing with us the above information.