



Re-Opening Guidebook for Churches

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Introduction

Fellow Servants:

It is apparent that things will never be the same when it comes to worshipping God in Spirit and in truth. We have all positive and negative thoughts regarding reopening our church. We all have questions such as: What will it be like considering social distancing rules?

How will we be seated? Should we hug our favorite seniors? What about the choir? How do we sit? What about communion as we know it? Can we shake hands? What about the collection of tithes and offerings? All of the above questions are part of the church experience especially in the Black church.

Although our facilities have been closed, the Church of Jesus Christ remains open and actively engaged in the lives of humanity. However, the reality of the global pandemic of COVID-19 has made us recalibrate how we provide opportunities for worship and our meetings as a community in wise and prudent ways for the greater protection and care of our parishioners. We emphasize that BOTH faith and wisdom be employed for the benefit of our brothers and sisters, the testimony of the Church, and the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

As federal and state ordinances are shifting from quarantine to relaunching businesses and communities, it is imperative to understand that the world has changed significantly. The Church has also recalibrated, regarding how we worship, equip, and most of all, how we make disciples during this pandemic. However, we remain the Church, and as such we will work to create strategies to reopen the doors of our facilities, hold ecclesiastical events and worship services with a thoughtful relaunch guide. This document attempts to provide a roadmap to assist us with that goal.

The General Baptist State Convention fully supports Executive Order 141 to responsibly reopen our state signed by Governor Roy Cooper. We recommend all GBSC churches honor the order while adhering to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Letter to the Congregation

We recommend writing a letter to the congregation outlining proposed modifications to the worship experience.

General Cleaning and Disinfection Protocols

- Deep cleaning the sanctuary such as shampooing the carpet, sanitizing the pews, bathrooms doorknobs, light- switches and microphones, and instruments and electronic sound board.
- Facilities will be thoroughly cleaned every night after use.
- All high-touch surfaces such as tables, doors, light switches, desks, telephones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc... will be disinfected with EPA-registered disinfectants.
- Take steps to ensure that all water systems (drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after prolonged closure to minimize the risk of water-associated illness.
- Put up posters on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 around the facilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html>
- Deep cleaning the sanctuary such as shampooing the carpet, sanitizing the pews, bathrooms doorknobs, light- switches and microphones, and instruments and electronic sound board.
- Removing all Bibles, fans, and hymn books, from the backs of pews and disinfect them as well.
- Post signs about not shaking hands and doing non-contact greetings.
- Inform members through email, mass messaging (voice & text), social media that our church is safe, clean and sanitized. If the church has two multiple services, then the sanctuary must be sanitized after each worship service.
- Hand sanitizing stations at all entrances and / or have hand sanitizer available in key areas of the facilities.
- Consider non-contact garbage cans: (1) they will be automatic or otherwise - (2) remain open - to reduce the spread of germs.

Worship Services & Assemblies

1. Determine how many people can be seated in the sanctuary in compliance with social distancing rules (six feet). Example: three persons can be seated on a pew. The exception is a family of four or five.
2. Churches hosting multiple services should ask persons to register for available times. This will allow for orderly worship and reduce the number of people potentially turned away.
3. Tape off pews for non-use (every other pew including the choir loft).
4. Eliminate printing weekly programs if possible. If you must, consider placing programs on the seats by the ushers.
5. Request the use of masks at all times while in the church except minor children 2 years and under. (Pulpit & Singers will temporarily remove their masks, maintaining physical distance/social distancing, for better voice projection.)
6. We will greet each other from 6 feet away without physical contact.
7. Children cannot be left alone without parental supervision / guardians.

Worship Service Flow

Continuing Virtual Worship is strongly recommended across multiple platforms. This protects high risk/vulnerable populations and in reaching the unchurched.

- Entrance into the build should be done through one door
- Thermo checks for all parishioners by a trained medical professional (including staff, media, & band...)
- Usher assigned seating with consideration for families riding together.
- Tithes/Offering/Giving boxes or baskets (supervised by ushers/trustees/security team) - Continue to encourage electronic donations.
- Reduce the size of Choirs and Praise Teams to maintain social distancing. Utilize technology.
- New Converts & new membership names should be recorded and shared with the New Member Ministry Team or local process.

- Altar Calls have people simply raise their hands from their seat for their request. We recommend that you not practice physical contact on an individual until it is safe. Create prayer request process.

Exiting the Worship Service

- Members will exit six feet from each other through one or two assigned doors. If possible, do not use entrance doors.
- Ministers will exit six feet apart from each other.
- Praise Team/Choir members exist six feet apart from each other.

Other Special Considerations

- Baptisms postponed until the COVID-19 vaccine is in full effect.
- Communion using prepackaged communion elements. Encourage families to bring their own. The communion should be passed out as members enter the sanctuary or placed in the pew holders. Members can leave their empty containers in the pew holders. Passing Communion Plates Is Highly Discouraged.
- Pastoral Care through conference calls or virtual conferences. Communicate contact protocol for members and staff.
- Sunday School via online classes or conference call.
- Meetings: All meeting should be held online or by conference call. If it becomes necessary to meet onsite, worship protocol should be followed.

Monitoring & Reporting

- ✓ Encourage any staff and congregant who feels ill to stay at home.
- ✓ Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been to the facility. Communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the *American Disabilities Act (ADA)*.
- ✓ Ask that people exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 stay home, self-monitor and follow CDC instructions if symptoms develop.

✓ Close the areas used by a sick person and do not use that area until after cleaning and disinfecting it. Wait 24-48 hours to clean and disinfect that area to reduce the risk to the cleaning team.

✓ Ask staff and congregants who have been exposed or are ill not to return to the facilities until they have met the CDC criteria: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

Additional Resources

CDC

Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

NCDHHS

Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 - <https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/NCDHHS-Interim-Guidance-for-Places-of-Worship-Phase-2.pdf>

Frequently Asked Questions on Cloth Face Coverings - <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/covid-19/FAQs-Cloth-Face-Coverings.pdf>