



MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, SOUTHERN PROVINCE

Provincial Elders' Conference

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To: Pastors, Fellowship Coordinators, Church Boards

Re: Recommendations about Re-Gathering

BACKGROUND

North Carolina entered Phase 2.5 of its reopening plan Sept. 4. This includes allowing indoor gatherings of up to 25 people and outdoor gatherings of up to 50. Social distancing, face covering requirements, and other precautions remain in place. The NC Governor's [Executive Order No. 163](#) (page 3) also identifies the following higher risk factors for COVID-19 infection:

- Settings that are indoors, where air does not circulate freely, and where people are less likely to maintain social distancing by staying six (6) feet apart.
- Settings where people are in close physical contact for extended periods of time (more than 15 minutes).
- Gatherings of large groups of people because these gatherings offer more opportunity for person-to-person contact with someone infected with COVID-19.

While the Executive Order exempts worship, religious and spiritual gatherings, funerals, weddings, and other First Amendment related activities, it also strongly urges those engaging in such activities to avoid holding mass gatherings (greater than 25 indoors or 50 outdoors). People at high risk (age 65 years or older, and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions) are very strongly encouraged to stay home and travel only for absolutely essential purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Until North Carolina enters Phase 3 of its reopening plan, The Provincial Elders' Conference strongly recommends the following.

- 1) When leaving home, remember the Three Ws:
 - a. Wear a cloth face covering.
 - b. Wait six feet apart. Avoid close contact.
 - c. Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer.
- 2) Those over the age of 65, those with underlying health conditions, and those with weakened immune systems remain at home as much as possible.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Thorough planning, preparation, and implementation are essential to protecting the health and safety of those who participate in the activities listed below. Please see the Guidelines for Group Gatherings and Church Offices which follows.

- 3) Indoor worship services, or gatherings of worship leaders to facilitate various on-line worship alternatives or other program offerings should be **limited to no more than 25 people**. (See Guidelines below). Note: For worship and other gatherings, a reservation system is recommended to manage group size.
- 4) Outdoor worship services, or other outdoor gatherings should be held only after necessary planning, preparation and communication to ensure everyone's health and safety. The NC Governor's order sets 50 as the maximum number for outdoor gatherings. However the PEC is not recommending a limit. (See Guidelines below).
- 5) Refrain from congregational or choir singing, and large-group bands, *until further notice*. Singing or playing instruments outdoors may not be as risky as indoors, but the virus particles are tiny, linger in the air, and can travel for long distances even on a very light breeze. Bands should be limited to no more than 4 to 5 players, facing the same direction, 6 to 8 feet apart from one another; if outdoors, make sure no one is downwind from the band. Lower-risk musical activities could include handbells (a small group, masked, physically distanced, gloved, and not sharing bells; Orff instruments; a solo singer (distanced from any accompanist); stringed instruments (players masked). In place of congregational hymns, have a soloist sing, or the organist play the hymn while someone reads the words aloud.
- 6) Avoid fellowship meals, coffee hours, or other such events that make physical distancing difficult.
- 7) In-person youth and children's activities should involve **no more than 25 people**, and be conducted outdoors, physically-distanced, and with face coverings and other precautions. (See Guidelines below).
- 8) Church meetings (boards, committees, Bible studies, fellowships, etc.) should, as much as possible, continue to utilize technology to meet remotely. If a decision is made to have in person meetings, these should involve **no more than 25 people**. (See Guidelines below).
- 9) Church staff should continue to work from home as much as possible. However, if staff work in the church facilities, volunteer staff and church members should be inside church facilities on an "as needed" basis. (See Guidelines below).
- 10) Church offices (including Provincial Offices) may be open to visitors. (See Guidelines below).

GUIDELINES for GROUP GATHERINGS and CHURCH OFFICES

The Provincial Elders' Conference strongly recommends pastors and church boards (or fellowship leaders):

- 1) Form a Team to develop a written plan specific to your congregation and its facilities for any of the group gatherings or activities listed.
- 2) If your congregation is not part of the Provincial group property and liability plan, consult your insurance agent or provider for any advice or guidelines.
- 3) Utilize the following resources to make sure the plan includes what is needed:
 - a. In NC, the Governor's [Executive Order No. 163](#), especially the excerpts listed below.
 - b. The [NC Dept. of Health and Human Services Interim Guidance for Places of Worship Phase 2](#)
 - c. From the Centers for Disease Control:
 - i. [Checklist: Get Your Organization Ready](#)
 - ii. [Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith](#)
 - iii. [Disinfecting Your Facility](#)Note: Go to the links for these resources, which provide complete information and links to other resources. PDFs of the webpage are attached for reference.
 - d. The following materials prepared or suggested by some of our ecumenical partners may provide useful information and questions to consider, and can be adapted to fit Moravian customs and practices. .
 - i. Western NC Conference, United Methodist Church: [Guidelines for In-Person Worship and Ministry during COVID-19](#)
 - ii. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: [Considerations for Returning to In-Person Worship](#) (especially Part 1: General Considerations).
- 4) Make certain your plan includes details about such things as: how people will enter and exit spaces used for gatherings and activities; screening questions to be used with staff on a daily basis, with visitors to church offices, and with all participants in events and activities; a way to gather contact information for those entering church facilities or participating in events and activities so that, if needed, contact tracing is possible; maintaining social distancing in all physical spaces (including entryways, vestibules, hallways, bathrooms); providing face coverings and hand sanitizer; and, routines for disinfecting and sanitizing all "high touch" surfaces, bathrooms, furnishings, and equipment.
- 5) Share and go over the plan (perhaps using video conferencing) with the church boards, those involved in event or activity leadership, and those involved in supporting roles (such as ushers, and greeters for a worship service).
- 6) Have a practice run, or walk through with everyone who will be involved in leading and supporting a gathering. Adjust the plan as needed.
- 7) Before resuming any gathering or activity, make certain that you have communicated effectively with members, participants and guests such things as: precautions and expectations for meetings, and assurances that safety and health concerns have been effectively addressed.

Excerpts from Executive Order No. 163

Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission. When people are outside their homes, they are strongly encouraged to take the following Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission:

- a. Maintain at least six (6) feet social distancing from other individuals, with the exception of family or household members.
- b. Wear a cloth Face Covering over the nose and mouth when leaving home and wear it inside all public settings such as grocery stores, pharmacies, or other retail or public serving businesses. A Face Covering should also be worn outdoors when you cannot maintain at least six (6) feet distancing from other people with the exception of family or household members.
- c. Carry hand sanitizer with you when leaving home, and use it frequently.
- d. Wash hands using soap and water for at least twenty (20) seconds as frequently as possible.
- e. Regularly clean high-touch surfaces such as steering wheels, wallets, and phones.
- f. Avoid large gatherings.
- g. Stay at home if sick.

Core Signage, Screening, and Sanitation Requirements are the following actions which establishments open to the public under the terms of this Executive Order must follow, namely:

- i. Post the Emergency Maximum Occupancy in a noticeable place.
- ii. Post signage reminding Guests and workers about social distancing (staying at least six (6) feet away from others) and requesting that people who have been symptomatic with fever and/or cough not enter.
- iii. Conduct daily symptom screening of workers, using a standard interview questionnaire of symptoms before workers enter the workplace.
- iv. Immediately isolate and remove sick workers.
- v. Perform frequent and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas with an EPA-approved disinfectant for SARS-Co V-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19).

NCDHHS has prepared sample signs and a sample screening checklist questionnaire, available at <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance> that may be used to meet some of the requirements above. Businesses or operations do not need to use the NCDHHS sample signs and questionnaires to meet the requirements of this Executive Order.