

**International Health Commission of the  
African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Guidelines for Reopening and Returning to Church  
Buildings**

**Parishioners Guide**



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*“These suggested practices have been developed from current guidance provided by leading health organizations in the country. The guidance in this area changes frequently and those reviewing this document should regularly consult with local health departments, other health organizations and medical professionals for up to date guidance and recommended approaches to mitigate risks of the spread of the coronavirus. Further, each congregation must adhere to the rules and regulations which apply within the state or locality in which they operate. No one set of practices fit every congregation and, as such, each church should consider all of the factors in applying these practices in their own congregation. No assurances can be given that following any list of practices or protocols will prevent all spread of the coronavirus or any other infectious disease.”*

## OVERALL

- **This is a quickly developing area within public health and that each church should regularly monitor organizations such as CDC or WHO as well as their state and local public health entities for updates to their recommendations.**
- Health organizations are updating and modifying their guidance almost daily. Each congregation should remain aware of the latest advice from medical and public health professionals and respond appropriately.
- Each community will have different governmental rules and regulations that should govern the actions of each local congregation.
- Monitor local and regional trends
- Certain populations and demographics are at heightened risk therefore assess the risk level of your local church community.
- If local church membership consists of mainly high-risk persons (defined below), then they should NOT re-open buildings until the curve of new cases in your area declines for more than 14 days and large-scale relaxation measures are affirmed. The other option is to partner with larger churches to maintain the required staffing.
- Due to the above, guidelines cannot be applied uniformly
- Strict social distancing with a minimum of 6 ft. should be maintained
- **Masks must be used by all**
- **The full guidelines document will be distributed to the Pastor who will create a planning team.**

## INDIVIDUAL INFECTION CONTROL

- Avoid touching your face, including your nose, mouth, and eyes
- All individuals who are displaying symptoms should **NOT** leave their homes and will not be able to enter church buildings.
- Hand hygiene
  - wash your hands frequently thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - application and/or use of hand rubs, gels, foams, or premoistened towelettes with 60%-95% alcohol.
- Cough etiquette
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough, sneeze, or into your upper sleeve, not into your hands.
    - Put used tissues directly into the wastebasket.
    - Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or use 60%-95% alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces and objects
- Maintain healthy habits and eating

## WHAT PARISHONERS MAY OBSERVE

- Always presume that COVID-19 has been left in the air and on surfaces. Therefore, the entire building(s) should be professionally **deep cleaned** prior to reopening. Utilize the guidance contained in the full Guidelines for Reopening and Returning to the Church Building before and between gatherings.
- If possible, virtual services should continue.
- **Use soap and water and hand sanitizer frequently**
- Until cleared, water fountains should be disabled and if available, bottle water should be used.
- All Bibles, hymnals, prayer books, books, hardcopy material, bulletins, laminated bulletins/materials routinely distributed, pens from pews and other public areas, and information cards will be removed and not permitted to be brought in. Do not bring pocketbooks and other external material into the building.
- A limited number will be allowed in the building. This will increase over time based on indications in the above section.
- **Music:** There will be **no** congregational or choir singing. There may be a small praise team or recorded music.
- Microphones will not be shared. If there is only one microphone, only one person will be using it.

- **Signage will be posted that reminds everyone:**
  - Non-contact greetings (no handshaking, hugs, etc.)
  - Those with symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath and other symptoms as they are added) to **NOT** enter
  - Those who are high risk to strongly consider staying at home
  - **At the entrance, a warning sign should be posted. An example of wording is: “Although as much has been done as possible, there is no guarantee that the building is COVID-free. If you enter, you acknowledge the personal risk.**
- If temperatures are being checked a non-touch or disposable thermometers. Names and temperatures will be recorded. Only those with temperatures less than 100.4 degrees F (38 degrees Celsius) should be admitted.
- Use separate doors for entrance and exit
- Coffee stations will be removed, and vending machines will be blocked or otherwise use prevented
- Food gatherings will continue to be suspended
- Records of attendance and location of seating maps will be maintained
- Dismissal from worship, study and other gatherings will have a specific order
- Please do not approach the altar
- **Worship through giving**
  - The offering plate should not be passed among the congregation nor exchanged between ushers.
  - Boxes/stations should be created where people may drop their offerings (**NOT** hand to an usher or other volunteer), and/or
  - Use an alternate giving options - Online, electronic, text, app, and postage
- **Stewardship and Finance Commission**
  - Ensure that there are gloves and masks to count and bag cash.
  - Bag the cash in a sealed (e.g. zipped bag) as soon as possible then wipe down the outer surface of the bag
  - Wash hands immediately. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available
- **Children**
  - No gathering of small children should be considered **until the last step or** before all daycares and public schools are open, whichever is the latter.
  - Children should remain with their household only. They should not be gathered with family and/or others who do not reside in their household.
  - Remember that children under 2 years of age should not wear masks or face coverings
- **Liturgy and Rituals Adaptation**
  - **Communion**
    - Will most likely be at the beginning of worship using, if they are available, pre-packaged communion cup/wafer kits.
    - Congregants should use hand sanitizer or other hand cleansing method prior to being given prepackaged kits
  - **Baptism**
    - A baptismal pool will not be used. There should not be any baptism by immersion
    - Social distancing must be maintained.
  - **Funerals/Wakes**
    - City, state, and other municipality guidelines will continue to be followed
    - Until such time as this, and potentially any other widely communicable diseases (e.g. Ebola) are contained, several regional practices should be discontinued.
      - Do **not** shake hands at the end of the service
      - Do **not** have persons sleep at the funeral home
      - Do **not** have overnight prayers. Even if gathering to any degree is permitted, this increases the potential exposure time.
      - Do **not** touch/kiss the deceased.