



MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, SOUTHERN PROVINCE

Provincial Elders' Conference

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Memo **May 28, 2020**
To: **Pastors, Fellowship Coordinators, Church Boards**
From: **Provincial Elders' Conference**
Re: **UPDATE on Worship Gatherings**

This memo is a further update regarding worship and other large-group gatherings in our congregations, fellowships and emerging ministries. It is based on the May 20 North Carolina [Governor's Executive Order no. 141](#), which moves the state into Phase 2 of a "re-opening" plan.

Congregations and fellowships outside of NC are strongly encouraged to be aware of and to follow any orders within your state, and any guidance provided by the state, county and municipal health departments.

A federal court order of May 16 (attached) set aside the Governor's limitations on the size of worship gatherings, whether indoors or outdoors. It also made clear the expectation that such gatherings should follow the "*Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission*," contained in the Governor's executive order. Governor Cooper did not appeal this Court order.

The Governor's May 20 order set a 10-person limit for indoor mass gatherings, and a 25-person limit for outdoor gatherings. However, the order exempted "worship, religious and spiritual gatherings, funeral ceremonies, and other activities constituting the exercise of First Amendment rights" from these limits. And, it also strongly urged: "that entities and individuals engaging in these exempted activities follow the Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission, avoid exceeding Emergency Maximum Occupancy in the places where they meet, and avoid holding Mass Gatherings."

In short, worship and other church gatherings of any size are permitted, but the Governor's order strongly urges churches to avoid holding gatherings over the limits listed above. The Court order also encouraged social distancing.

The question is not "Are we allowed to do this?" but, rather, "Is this the safe thing for us to do?"

The Provincial Elders' Conference has considered factors such as:

- The COVID-19 disease is such that a person can be infected and thus contagious without knowing it; some who are infected show no or minimal symptoms; it appears to spread primarily by person-to-person contact involving exposure to very small "droplets" which are spread by coughing, sneezing, or even talking or breathing; though less likely, it may also spread by contact with contaminated surfaces.
- In many places the trends that the White House identified as benchmarks for moving through the various phases of "re-opening" are unclear as to their direction (which should be downward, indicating control measures are working).
- Large group indoor gatherings in which people are together for a significant period of time are at risk to become "hotspots" of infection.
- Roughly 25% of the members of our Province are age 65 or above. This, in itself, places them in a high risk group that the CDC, and the Governor's orders have consistently said need to stay home and travel only for absolutely essential purposes.

- We are investigating the extent of our insurance coverage as a Province, and for congregations which participate in the group property and liability insurance plan.
- Planning, obtaining necessary supplies, preparation, and communication for a safe resumption of large group church gatherings should be a careful and thorough process and will take time. (See suggestions, below)
- Perhaps most importantly: As a matter of principle, and part of our witness in the community, the church has a special responsibility to be a place of safety for all, and to protect the health and well-being of its members, visitors, and all those it serves in Christ's name.

Based on these and other considerations, the **PEC strongly encourages congregations not to have indoor worship services and other indoor large-group gatherings until at least June 30, or until we enter Phase 3 of the reopening process.**

While the May 20 Governor's Executive Order lifts the "stay at home" order we strongly recommend:

- Indoor worship services, or gatherings of worship leaders to facilitate various on-line worship alternatives or other program offerings be limited to no more than 10 people. Everyone involved should observe the "*Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission.*" (See below).
- Outdoor worship services, or other outdoor gatherings be held only after necessary planning, preparation and communication to ensure everyone's health and safety. Everyone involved should observe the "*Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission.*" (See below).
- Church staff continue to work from home as much as possible. And, Church meetings (boards, committees, Bible studies, fellowships, etc.) continue to utilize technology to meet remotely.
- If Church Offices are open, the guidelines we offered in our May 13 memo should be followed. **In addition**, the requirements for "*Core Signage, Screening and Sanitation Requirements*" in Executive Order 141 should be followed. (See below).
- The following people who are at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should continue to stay home and travel only for absolutely essential purposes: Those 65 years or older and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions, including people who are immunocompromised or who have chronic lung disease, moderate-to-severe asthma, serious heart conditions, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, or liver disease. (*From EO 141*)
- **Congregational leaders should use the time before June 30 to develop a comprehensive plan about how to safely resume large group gatherings for worship and other activities. See the suggestions for developing a plan at the end of this memo.**

We recognize that waiting to resume indoor worship and other large group gatherings is not what any of us wishes. However, the health and safety of our members and families, those that we welcome and serve, and the wider community must be our priority.

What we Moravians have proven over these past weeks is that our community is strong even as we have moved to creative ways to be together while physically apart. Others are finding us and connecting with how we are living and expressing our faith in ways we never imagined. And, the same is true of our mission. We have continued, expanded, and even launched new efforts to reach and to serve others with the love of Christ, and His power as our risen Lord.

May Christ's presence as this Easter season draws to a close, bring us peace and joy.

The Provincial Elders' Conference

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Planning for Resuming Worship and Other Large Group Gatherings

The PEC strongly recommends pastors and church boards (or fellowship leaders):

- Form a Team to develop a written plan specific to your congregation and its facilities for how worship and large group gatherings will resume.
- If your congregation is not part of the Provincial group property and liability plan, consult your insurance agent or provider.
- Utilize the following resources to make sure the plan includes what is needed:
 - In NC, the Governor’s Executive Order No. 141, especially the excerpts listed below.
 - The [NC Dept. of Health and Human Services Interim Guidance for Places of Worship Phase 2](#)
 - From the Centers for Disease Control:
 - [Checklist: Get Your Organization Ready](#)
 - [Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith](#)

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.
 - The April 27 Memo from the PEC about “reopening”.
 - The following materials prepared or suggested by some of our ecumenical partners may provide useful information and questions to consider:
 - Western NC Conference, United Methodist Church: [Guidelines for In-Person Worship and Ministry during COVID-19](#)
 - Ken Braddy: [48 Questions to Ask Prior to Reopening Your Church](#)
- Share and go over the plan (perhaps using video conferencing) with the church boards, those involved in worship leadership, and those involved in supporting worship services (greeters, ushers, etc.).
- Have a practice run, or walk through with everyone who will be involved in leading and supporting a gathering. Adjust the plan as needed.
- Make certain that – before you resume large group gatherings – 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 the NC Governor's Executive Order No. 141

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:

- a. Post the Emergency Maximum Occupancy in a noticeable place.
- b. Post signage reminding attendees, customers, 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.
- c. Conduct daily symptom screening of workers, using a standard interview questionnaire of symptoms, before workers enter the workplace.
- d. Immediately isolate and remove sick workers.
- e. Perform frequent and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas with an EPA-approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-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.

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:

1. Maintain at least six (6) feet social distancing from other individuals, with the exception of family or household members.
2. Wear a cloth Face Covering 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. These coverings function to protect other people more than the wearer.
3. Carry hand sanitizer with you when leaving home, and use it frequently.
4. Wash hands using soap and water for at least twenty (20) seconds as frequently as possible.
5. Regularly clean high-touch surfaces such as steering wheels, wallets, and phones.
6. Stay at home if sick.