



MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, SOUTHERN PROVINCE

Provincial Elders' Conference

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April 27, 2020

To: Pastors, and Congregational and Fellowship Leaders
From: The Provincial Elders' Conference
Re: COVID-19: "Reopening" Church Events and Activities

The Provincial Elders' Conference has been encouraged by the resilience and creativity we have witnessed among congregations and church leaders during an unprecedented time of uncertainty and challenge.

We continue in prayer for you; for our communities and nation; for those who have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 outbreak, especially those who have lost loved ones; and for first-responders and all who are risking their own well-being to meet the health, physical, social and spiritual needs of others.

March 27 we provided guidance as "stay at home" orders were given in various states and municipalities across the Province. It may be several weeks before church events, meetings, and activities may fully resume. This memo provides some updates and further guidelines.

We invite you to **share this memo with your church board(s) or fellowship committee and to begin conversations and planning now**, so that when it is possible to resume activities you will be ready to move forward.

CURRENT STATUS OF "STAY AT HOME" ORDERS

April 16, the White House issued the President's "[Guidelines: Opening America Again.](#)" This provides criteria to be met prior to any state or region beginning a phased process of resuming activities. For example: Phase 1 of the plan still includes: protecting the vulnerable, limiting group sizes, practicing social distancing and minimizing non-essential travel. State governors are the primary decision-makers as to when and how such steps unfold.

In **North Carolina**, the Governor's "stay at home" executive orders have been extended until **May 8**, and continue to limit large-group gatherings such as worship to 10 or fewer individuals who maintain social distancing, or 50 or fewer at a funeral service. We are awaiting further information about how and when North Carolina may be ready to enter Phase 1 of the White House plan.

In the City of **Winston-Salem**, the Mayor has extended a "stay at home" order until **May 7** and has endorsed a "Mask the City" initiative urging residents to wear a cloth face cover and maintain social distancing when in public for 40 days, April 22 through May 31, 2020.

For **churches outside of North Carolina**, we strongly advise that your check with your local and state authorities to: a) learn of any declarations or orders, and b) make preparations to fulfill what is required and to be of help to others as the circumstances allow.

Regardless of location, the lifting or expiration of any "stay at home" order does not mean an immediate return to the full level and variety of activities prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Return to "normal" will be a phased process. Careful planning and preparation will be needed.

Congregations throughout the Province will still need to:

- Follow any directives or guidelines from state or local civil authorities, and the Centers for Disease Control, especially regarding the size of and conditions for group gatherings,
- Be prepared to adjust plans based on changes in any directives and guidelines.
- Continue to follow all instructions and advice for preventing illness (see below)
- Prioritize the health and safety of all who may enter church facilities or participate in activities, including sufficient preparation and maintaining appropriate precautions.

PREVENTING ILLNESS

The [Steps to Prevent Illness](#) suggested by the Centers for Disease Control are still important:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Wear a cloth face cover when you are around other people.
- Maintain social distancing when in public – 6 feet between yourself and others.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.

WHEN (and WHERE) LARGER GROUP GATHERINGS ARE ALLOWED

We recommend a careful, step-by-step decision-making process about whether, how and when to resume group gatherings, including worship services. Such decisions should follow any local, state or national directives or guidance. After plans are set, thorough preparation and communication will also be needed. These things may take time, perhaps several weeks.

Below is a list of some of the matters to be addressed before any resumption of activities. Your church leadership may identify other particular needs or concerns in addition to these.

- Clean and disinfect all “high touch” surfaces in your bathrooms, kitchens, classrooms and worship space (including Bibles and Books of Worship) before worship, and between worship services. (The same would be needed for other group gatherings).
- Encourage participants to wear facemasks or cloth face covering. In some communities this may be required. Provide face coverings for those who do not bring their own.
- Make hand sanitizer available for attendees. Stay well-stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Encourage those over the age of 65, those with underlying health conditions, and those with weakened immune systems to remain at home, and provide alternative ways they can participate (via technology).

- Incorporate social distancing – currently advised to be 6 feet -- into your worship experience or other large gathering. Based on directives from civil authorities, determine how many people your meeting spaces can safely accommodate at one time. Spread out throughout the sanctuary or other large spaces, and maintain a 6-foot distance from one another. Dismiss worship or meetings in sections. Plan how to avoid congregating in hallways, entry areas and restrooms. Encourage attendees to visit with each other outdoors.
- Avoid passing the collection plate from person to person. Instead, allow attendees to drop their tithes and gifts in a central location or encourage mail or online giving instead. Anyone handling offering envelopes or money should wear gloves.
- Avoid physical contact such as handshaking during rituals of friendship, and consider alternate ways to greet one another in worship, such as waves, nods, “heart pats” and smiles.
- Take special care when serving or taking communion. This includes providing hand sanitizer to worship participants, and not observing communion by common cup or intinction.
- Do not provide food, or be certain to use safe food handling practices during fellowship time.
- Decide about whether you will offer, and how to provide a safe environment for child care during activities, or other programs (such as Sunday school, or youth activities).

In addition, the following should also be considered, decided and planned:

- How will you provide for those who may, for health or safety reasons, choose not to immediately return to church gatherings even after re-opening?
- How will you communicate effectively with members, participants and guests such things as: plans, precautions and expectations for meetings, and assurances that safety and health concerns have been effectively addressed?

During this season of Easter, we are called to claim and live in the power of our Lord’s resurrection. Our liturgy uses the words of the Apostle Paul to encourage us, even today:

Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Christ, who loved us.

For we are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor powers, nor heights, nor depths, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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