



Southern California Conference  
of Seventh-day Adventists®

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# Guidelines & Protocols for Reopening Churches

During this time of a world-wide pandemic, in the Southern California Conference, it is our duty to make decisions and give guidance based upon our historical focus on physical, mental and spiritual health. This pandemic is like the thief referenced by Jesus in John 10:10 that comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus came so that we may have life and have it in abundance. Jesus has instructed us to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Our guidance is and will continue to be based on prioritizing the health and safety of our members in this hopefully short but very difficult time, while encouraging ministry to continue and expand in new ways with a focus protecting the physical well-being of our congregations. Although we know we have the special blessing of God, we are also told by Jesus in Matthew 5:45 that our heavenly Father causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and that He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Our guidance is given within the context of knowing that we are not immune to the effects of this pandemic and must at this time have a very high priority on the physical health of our members and guests.

We anticipate that in the near future, regional governmental agencies will have more variance in local guidance than currently exists. The Conference Coronavirus Intervention Committee (CIC) will monitor these changes along with virus trends and data in local regions. If and when the CIC feels it is safe to do so, there may be updated regional guidelines in the future. All guidelines will be subject to modifications as we learn more about the virus.

It will be important to educate some of our likely more vocal members in the future that a significant percentage of transmission occurs from individuals who have no symptoms at the time they are infecting others. This will remain a major background element of our guidelines as long as community transmission continues to occur.

We are providing these guidelines & protocols to allow you & your team to prepare your church for reopening.

**The date that your church reopens will depend upon your ability to follow these guidelines.** If you plan to open this coming Sabbath, May 30, you must be able to meet these guidelines, including educating your parishioners on what to expect on the first day of reopening. If you find that you do not have enough time to prepare by this Sabbath, you must give yourself time and instead open no sooner than the following Sabbath, June 6, **if you are able to follow the guidelines by that date.**

# START WITH PRAYER

- Pray for the safe reopening of the church.
- Make the first in-person service a special one.



# PREPARE TEAM MEMBERS

- Establish and meet with your church reopening team prior to the first Sabbath of in-person services.
- Prepare a specific disinfection protocol for facilities, including plans for cleaning during services & between multiple services.
- Assign team members to be responsible for preparing (cleaning & sanitizing) all areas within the church. *(Use the chart on the next slide to track cleaning & sanitizing progress.)*

<b>DATE &amp; TIME</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>AREA ASSIGNED</b>	<b>CLEAN</b>	<b>SANITIZED</b>

Some high-touch areas will need constant and regular sanitization (i.e., door knobs).

# GUIDELINES

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Church members who either are or who reside with a family member who is defined by the CDC as part of the vulnerable population should not attend in person services at this time.
  - *The CDC defines the vulnerable population as follows: People sixty-five (65) years and older; people who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility; people of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including: people with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, people who have serious heart conditions, people who are immunocompromised, people with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher), people with diabetes, people with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, people with liver disease.*
- Refrain from inviting guest speakers from other churches for the time being.

# GUIDELINES

## PASTORS & THE VULNERABLE POPULATION

For pastors where either they or a member of their cohabitating family unit are part of the vulnerable population as defined by the CDC, it is encouraged that they not physically attend services and instead join via an electronic medium, such as Zoom. If it is felt they must be physically present, they should enter and exit through a different door that gives access to the platform without going through the sanctuary whenever possible, and must stay on the platform or area in the front of the church while, in an abundance of caution to protect them and/or their family members as much as possible, at all times maintain a minimum of fifteen (15) feet from other attendees.

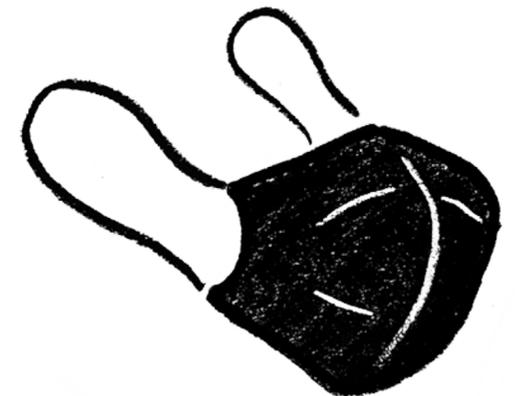
# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

## AT-RISK POPULATIONS

- What about ministry to vulnerable attendees?
  - As mandated by the state/county, they will be the last to join large gathering worship service.
  - How can we offer other, safer options to minister to this important group? Be creative!

# REQUIREMENTS

- Screen attendees for temperature using an infrared “touchless” thermometer.
- Provide hand sanitizer.
- Have extra cloth masks on hand for attendees who come without required facial coverings.



# REQUIREMENTS

- Block off every other parking spot either using a taped "X" or with cones, if you have them available.
- Close food service areas, and do not hold potlucks or similar family-style eating and drinking events that increase the risk of cross contamination. Temporarily disconnect and block off water fountains. Consider providing bottled water.
- Ask attendees to strictly follow social distancing guidelines including refraining from any physical contact, such as shaking hands, hugging, kissing, or elbow bumping, etc.



# PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

## CLEANING & SANITIZING REQUIREMENTS

- Deep clean your entire church.
- It is mandatory that you sanitize pews, bathroom, light switches and microphones. Please also consider shampooing carpet.
- Use chemicals and disinfectants as directed, including allowing for the necessary proper dwell time (the amount of time disinfectants need to remain wet on surfaces to properly disinfect). ***(Make sure you use COVID-19 approved disinfectants.)***

# PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

## SABBATH SCHOOL & OTHER CLASSES

- Limit in-person gatherings (*e.g., stream Sabbath school lesson study or Friday night vespers*).
- At this time, in-person children's ministries are not allowed. Close all children's areas. Children's Sabbath school will not hold in-person classes at this time, but are welcome to hold digital classes. Children must remain with and under direct supervision of their parents so that family units remain together. In-person classes will be phased in at a later time.
- Vacation Bible School must be conducted virtually at this time.
- Pathfinders cannot hold in-person meetings or events, but are encouraged to continue with digital meetings.

# PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

## MOTHER'S ROOM

- Mother's rooms may only be used for parents with infants. If a mother's room is large enough to allow more than one family unit while maintaining social distancing, mark out "sections" of the room for individual family units that allows six (6) feet of separation between each family unit. Parents must diligently supervise toddlers.

# PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

## OTHER NECESSARY PREPARATIONS & COMMUNICATION

- Temporarily remove Bibles, hymnals, information cards, etc., from the backs/bottoms of chairs/pews. Remaining pencils, pens, etc., in the pews must be cleaned and sanitized if the church will be used within three (3) days.
- Inform your congregation through flyers on the doors, e-mails and social media about how you have prepared the church for their arrival. Inform them that the church facility is “clean” and “safe” for a healthy worship experience.

# PREPARE YOUR CHURCH

## RESTROOM PROTOCOL

- Assign a temporary maximum occupancy for each restroom (other than single restrooms) that will comply with strict social distancing protocol.
- Social distancing protocol must be followed at all times.
- Please post signs in the restrooms about washing hands with appropriate guidelines to do so.
- Consider assigning individuals to clean restrooms (wipe down fixtures, countertops, doorknobs, etc.) between uses.

# GUIDELINES

## SERVICE DETAILS

- Continue offering online giving options. Have stations in the church where people can drop offering instead of passing a plate.
- Do not pass microphones on the rostrum. Instead, place them on stands and sanitize them between uses.
- Clean pulpit before and after every use.

# GUIDELINES

## SERVICE TIMES & LENGTH

As churches ramp up in-person service worships, keep in mind that in the beginning the **goal is to limit the overall time groups of people spend together in confined indoor spaces** to manage the risk of transmission.

# GUIDELINES

## MULTIPLE SERVICE OPTION

- Consider every other Sabbath **rotating in-person attendance** or **multiple services** to accommodate congregations larger than the public gatherings limit set by the county.
- Determine an orderly way to dismiss attendees to ensure social distancing. Consider assigning deacons to dismiss attendees by row, giving time to allow distance between rows.
- Provide an online streamed service option to allow some members to continue worshiping at home.

# GUIDELINES

## SEATING DETAILS & PROTOCOL

- **Pre-mark seating options** in the sanctuary that complies with required social distancing (at least every third pew).
- **RSVP** (for multiple services).
- **Up to 25% of the building capacity or 100 maximum attendees (whichever is less)** per service, with options for flexible scheduling or multiple services.

# GUIDELINES

## CONTACT TRACING ATTENDEES

- Place bulletins on the pews or chairs, and ask people to take bulletins home with them.
- Maintain a list of the attendees for every service in order to facilitate future contact tracing, if necessary. Include in bulletins a card where attendees can record those who attended and contact information for each family unit that was present. Designate a place where these can be deposited before attendees leave.
- Take a photo of the congregation to document where individuals chose to sit

# GUIDELINES

- Eliminate congregational praise & singing (instead, consider instrumental music, playing pre-recorded videos or other alternatives).
- Do not congregate at the altar, such as in a garden of prayer or children's story.

# GUIDELINES

## BOARD & OTHER MEETINGS, SMALL GROUPS

- Board meetings, committees and small groups may occur, but they must be in a room large enough to accomplish a minimum of six (6) feet between each attendee at all times, and all attendees must always wear masks.

# GUIDELINES

## COMMUNION

- Unleavened bread and grape juice must be picked up prior to service (or made at home).
- Foot washing must observe social distancing and may only be performed by family units living together.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider ways to increase ventilation of indoor spaces, to improve central air filtration, and to use portable air purifiers.
- Ceiling fans should not be used. Portable fans may be used at non-entry doors with fan blowing air outdoors only. Other doors and/or windows should be open to allow outside air to come in the building.
- Rearrange rooms as appropriate to address current needs.
- Consider using well-ventilated outdoor settings for meetings and services.

# MORE INFO

## REOPENING GUIDANCE GRID

Check out this handy grid we've created to sum up the guidelines and details outlined in this presentation. We have included guidance on various specific scenarios and what this guidance might look like moving forward.

You can find this grid on our website at <https://scc.adventist.org/coronavirus/reopening-grid>.

### Guidance for Reopening Southern California Conference Churches

*Overriding Principle: Always follow CDC guidelines and state or local health orders as appropriate*

ITEM/ACTIVITY	PRE-OPENING	STAGE 1 • Initial Opening	STAGE 2 • Health Orders Still in Effect
1 Vulnerable populations*	Should not participate in person	Should not attend or participate in person	Any changes as allowed per health orders
2 Temperature screening on arrival	Per state or local health orders/guidance for office settings	Temperature screening on arrival, using an infrared "touchless" thermometer	Per state or local health orders/guidance
3 In-person Sabbath school	Not permitted — use digital tools/platforms	Not permitted — use digital tools/platforms	Any changes as allowed per health orders
4 Children's Sabbath school (cradle roll & kindergarten)	Not allowed	Not allowed	Allowed with any ongoing restrictions per health orders
5 Minimum distance from speaker or praise team to attendees	N/A	Fifteen (15) feet	If social distancing still in health order, fifteen (15) feet
6 Praise team	Allowed if total individuals at church are less than five (5) and practicing appropriate social distancing	Not allowed, instrumental music only with appropriate social distancing and masking	If social distancing still in health order and allowed by health order, allowed with appropriate social distancing among members and minimum distance of fifteen (15) feet between praise team and attendees
7 Choir	N/A	Not allowed	Per health orders regarding churches
8 Congregational singing	N/A	Not allowed	As allowed by health orders
9 Children's story	N/A	Children not allowed in front; must be with and under direct supervision of parents all times	Allowed with compliance of health orders/guidance
10 Congregational prayer/garden of prayer	N/A	Prayer requests may be submitted via electronic means, no gathering at the front of the church	Prayer requests may be submitted via electronic means, no gathering at the front of the church unless allowed by health orders/guidance
11 Bulletins or handouts	N/A	Not allowed	Not allowed
12 Attendee documentation	N/A	Pictures with appropriate resolution/distance to identify attendees, electronic check-in process encouraged	Pictures with appropriate resolution/distance to identify attendees, electronic check-in process encouraged
13 Wearing of masks (supply of masks should be available for individuals who did not bring their own)	Mandatory for all participants when not actively speaking/singing, minimum of fifteen (15) clear feet in front of speaker/singer	Mandatory for all attendees except when unable or unsafe, i.e., small children or others to whom wearing a mask would present risk. Can only be removed while speaking on platform, and speaker must be minimum of fifteen (15) feet from any attendee	Per health orders/guidance, with minimum of fifteen (15) feet from any speaker/singer and nearest attendee
14 Offering collection	Online, mail or drop-off collection box only	Online, mail or drop-off collection box only	Online, mail or drop-off collection box only
15 Estimated maximum capacity per service in order to comply with social distancing	N/A	Twenty-five (25) percent of the building's capacity or 100 maximum attendees (whichever is less)	Dependent on social distancing as required per health orders
16 Available pew spacing and seating	N/A	Minimum of eight feet from back of pew to front of next available pew	May be adjusted based upon social distancing as required by health orders
17 Communion	N/A	Unleavened bread and grape juice must be picked up...	

# **OTHER QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

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## DIGITAL MINISTRY

- How will you protect yourself and your members yet still have a welcoming environment?
- What is the church's digital strategy going forward?
  - A strong digital presence is no longer just an option or a luxury. It's necessary!
  - Invest in equipment.

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

## OUTREACH & SERVICE

- How can the church better serve the community?
  - Start now to connect.
  - Plan to engage and collaborate.
- How will you evangelize in the new environment?