



# (re)LAUNCH CHURCH

(re)considering church  
in a covid-19 world



## **STUDY GUIDEBOOK** **WITH HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES**

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# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide may feel overwhelming.

And it should.

At the time of this writing, 1.42 million Americans have contracted COVID-19, and more than 84,000 have died. While we managed to slow the rate of transmission so we didn't overwhelm our hospitals, this highly infectious disease is still with us. Throughout the Mountain Sky Conference states, local/county/state governments are entering a new phase in the fight against the coronavirus.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we follow a different mandate as we enter a new phase: to love our neighbor as we love God and do no harm. This guide offers you not only practical topics to reduce risk management, liability, and infection, but also pastoral, theological, and spiritual considerations to help you move into the next phase of ministry.

**We ask that you gather with core congregational leadership and work through the guidebook together.** We know the tendency would be to go to the practical health and safety guidelines and move no further through this book. However, we believe that this two-fold approach helps us do both the risk management as well as the deep reflection, discussion, and integration necessary to (re)Launch well.

You have done good, faithful, and hard work these last few months. Take time to do the important integration and reflection and create the space to listen to what God might be teaching you and your congregation in these days we are living.

We can never go back to what was. This guidebook can offer you the framework to enter into a new and fruitful future.

Godspeed!

LETTER FROM BISHOP KAREN OLIVETO



Mountain Sky Area of The United Methodist Church  
Mountain Sky Conference

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May 15, 2020

To the People Called United Methodist of the Mountain Sky Conference,

Jesus, before he was betrayed, directed Simon Peter to “feed my lambs, tend my sheep.” (John 21: 15-19). Here, Jesus entrusts his disciples to care for the ones Jesus loved: the lost, the least, the lonely.

Jesus asks the same of you and me. We are to care for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of those whom Jesus loves.

This takes on a responsibility of epic proportions in these COVID-19 days we are living. How do we gather as the Body of Christ and keep one another safe from infection? What guidelines must we follow if we are to move from online ministry to in-person worship and small groups? How do we prepare our people so that the most vulnerable in our midst will be kept safe?

COVID-19 is far from over. While our physical distancing has helped flatten the curve, infections (and deaths) are still occurring. The most vulnerable population to COVID-19 (those over 65) are the majority in our congregations. As disciples of Jesus, we have a serious responsibility to organize and build up ministry in ways that are accessible to all, beginning with the most vulnerable.

Since March, the Mountain Sky Conference COVID-19 Crisis team has been meeting to guide the MSC response, communications, and programming through the pandemic. Team members include:

Margaret Hotze  
Bruce Burger  
Patti Agnew  
Janet Mulroy  
Angela Thomas  
Michael Smith

Gayla Jo Slauson  
AJ Bush  
Angie Kotzmoyer  
Dawn Skerritt  
Jeff Rainwater  
Bishop Karen Oliveto

Don McCammon  
Gary Haddock  
Zach Bechtold  
Charmaine Robledo  
Annie Arnoldy

Before considering a return to in-person worship and meetings, all congregations are asked to create a team to work through this guidebook. You will find both concrete steps for safety and health, as well as critical questions to help you consider what ministry in the next phase of COVID-19 will look like.

**I do not want one single case of COVID-19 traced to one of our churches because we did not care for those whom Jesus loves.**

I hope you will find this guidebook helpful as you (re)Launch your ministries.

May God continue to bless you and your ministries,

Bishop Karen P. Oliveto

A STATEMENT FROM MSC TRUSTEES



Mountain Sky Conference  
The United Methodist Church

Dear Mountain Sky Conference Churches:

The Conference Board of Trustees fully supports the ministry and mission of our churches, extension ministries, and community partners. We share a desire to return to “normal” activities and gatherings as soon as possible, to engage in those forms of worship, discipleship, and fellowship that we are accustomed to experiencing, and to be physically present with one another. **However, now is not that time.** During our current health crisis and beyond, we must consider the health and safety of every individual, not the “average” among our church family. We must plan carefully for (re)Launch, following the most stringent of guidelines for reopening our spaces; require adherence to protocols without exception; and weigh the time and cost of establishing and maintaining safe space against the ministry benefits.

How do we best serve our community? At what point do we serve our buildings more than we serve our family? Each church must consider their local context and the risks that COVID-19 present in that context. Knowing which resources offer the best guidelines for safely preparing to open the doors can be tricky. We hope that this guidebook helps you fully prepare for the next phase of ministry. Also check frequently for specific guidance from your local agencies (for example, health department) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). **While this guidebook will help you make decisions, remember that, where safety and health are concerned, following the strictest guidelines will help protect our community. No shortcuts, please.**

Please keep in mind that churches who fail to exercise great care in relaunching may create liability that insurance will not cover or that will be costly to defend. The most recent information from Church Mutual states that

*Unfortunately, we cannot provide advisory opinions on how insurance coverage would apply in a hypothetical situation. As with any claim, we'd undertake an investigation into all facts and applicable law. That said, whether insurance coverage applies to defend or indemnify an insured depends on the allegations contained in the lawsuit against the church. Your insurance policy does cover, subject to the terms, conditions and exclusions of the coverage, claims of “bodily injury” meaning “bodily injury, sickness, or disease sustained by a person, including death resulting from any of these at any time”.*

*As a general principle, Church Mutual recommends that all insureds comply with all state and local laws and ordinances related to COVID-19. General liability policies do have an exclusion for the “willful violation of a penal statute or ordinance committed by or with the knowledge or consent of any insured.” If holding worship services in a manner that violates such law or ordinances, general liability coverage may not apply if there is a claim arising against the insured arising out of the holding of such worship service. Again, should a claim be presented, Church Mutual would undertake an investigation at that time into what, if any, insurance coverage would apply. Church Mutual reserves all rights under the policy and applicable law.*

*Church Mutual recommends that you take necessary safety precautions to avoid the spread of COVID-19 and follow the CDC guidelines available on our website <https://coronavirus.churchmutual.com/>.*

As Trustees, we are not willing to risk the health and safety of one person, and we ask that pastors and church leaders take great care in opening church doors.

With gratitude,

H.D. Casner, Jr.  
President, Board of Trustees

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# PART I: HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR (re)LAUNCHING CHURCH

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The following guidelines are written for clergy and local church leadership to address the care and preparation of the physical plant of the church. More specifically, how churches prepare their buildings in a way that provides the safest possible space for their congregation to gather and worship in this most extraordinary time. *AT LEAST THROUGH May 31, 2020, Bishop Karen Oliveto has recommended that all churches in the Mountain Sky Conference suspend all in-person worship.* Prior to moving back to in-person worship, gatherings and activities, each church is asked to develop a plan that addresses the physical safety of those who use the church as well as integrate the lessons that we've learned as we move into the next phase of COVID-19.

As the MSC Crisis Team, we designate in-person worship as a **GREEN STATUS** activity only for all congregations regardless of size and location.

**NOTE: Permission to begin in-person worship/Green Status phase must be given by the Bishop's office through each church's District Superintendent. Your implementation plan should address all major points of the guidelines that follow.**

**First,** Clergy and church leadership should review in detail the following statements:

1. Statement from Bishop (included above)
2. Statement from Mountain Sky Conference Trustees (included above)

**Next,** Clergy and church leadership should review these important resources:

1. **Centers for Disease Control (CDC)** ([Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) - Get Your Community- and Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019](#))

2. **HHS.Gov – Primary Resources The Role of Faith-based and Community Leaders**  
(<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/3-27-2020-faith-and-community-based-covid-19-faq.pdf>)
3. **State and county directives**

## 2. STATUS LEVELS OVERVIEW

### RED STATUS

**Stop all in-person worship and gatherings.** Essential workers only are allowed in the church building(s). This is the "Stay in Love with God" time and stay-home phase of our ministry. Right now it is best to err on the side of caution, even as directives are eased from the various Mountain Sky Governors. Details related to the Red Status are provided at the end of this section. **As of this publishing, the Mountain Sky Conference is operating within the Red Status through May 31, 2020.**

### YELLOW STATUS

**Cautionary Return.** It is anticipated this will cover a number of months. As the MSC, we want to "Do Good" as restrictions are lifted. This may mean a gradual return to gatherings, depending on the circumstances. Yellow Status begins **when state and local officials have reported a 14-day downward trend of cases**, hospitals are treating patients without crisis care, and there is a robust testing program in place, including antibody testing.

### GREEN STATUS

**In-person gatherings** are the "Do No Harm" phase that can be initiated when the virus is contained. Permission will be granted to communities of faith to return to full activity and in-person gatherings. This will be in place only as church leadership is confident in the care of their community of faith. Green status for all activities will likely be dependent on a testing protocol for asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers, antibody testing, therapeutic drug therapies, aggressively caring for those who have contracted COVID-19, and approval and availability of a COVID-19 vaccine. State and local officials must have successfully met



the criteria of Yellow Status, and there must be evidence through case reporting, testing, and community monitoring that there is no evidence of a rebound.

The Mountain Sky Conference of The United Methodist Church recognizes returning to full participation will be based on the oversight of the Bishop, Crisis Response Team, state, and national guidelines, as well as the seasonal movement of the virus. It is expected that clergy and church leadership will read through this document together allowing it to guide the response of the local faith community.

## **STATUS LEVEL PROTOCOLS**

### **3. RED STATUS**

**As of this printing, the Mountain Sky Conference is operating within the Red Status through May 31, 2020.**

- Suspension of in-person worship and gatherings. Essential workers only are allowed on church property. This is the "Stay in Love with God" time and stay home phase of our ministry. Right now it is best to err on the side of caution, even as restrictions are eased from various Mountain Sky Governors.
- All Mountain Sky Conference churches should operate in the Red Status through May 31, 2020, at which point that status will be reassessed.
- High-risk individuals should practice sheltering in place. This would include people over 60 years of age, those with underlying conditions or other vulnerabilities, those who have tested positive for COVID-19, and those who have been exposed to someone COVID-19 positive in the last 14 days. This includes clergy, staff, volunteers, parishioners, and guests.

### **General Building Protocol in RED Status**

**COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN** to reduce confusion and allow each aspect of church life: worship, pastoral care, mission, ministry, sacraments, small groups, and administration to flow as smoothly and safely as possible.

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- Church buildings and common areas should remain closed.
- HVAC systems and other mechanical systems should be adjusted to minimize unneeded use. Trustees should monitor the building systems to ensure the building(s) is protected and operational.
- Community groups, support groups, and other renters should continue to meet virtually.
- Weddings and memorial services should continue to be postponed or conducted virtually.
- Signage should be posted throughout the building in strategic areas to encourage healthy practices and hygiene.
- The church should provide masks, hand sanitizer, soap, disinfectant wipes, spray and cleaner for staff, building users and unexpected visitors.

### **Worship and Special Gatherings in RED Status**

- Churches of the Mountain Sky Conference are strongly encouraged to continue holding online worship services.
- If online worship is recorded in the sanctuary, only necessary team members and staff may gather and are to maintain proper physical distances of 6-10 feet and comply with all state and local requirements for gathering. At this time, it is strongly recommended that no more than 10 people gather at any one time in the church building(s). Groups of less than 10 people may gather for the purposes of recording or service production while maintaining personal protective measures and staying 6-10 feet apart.
- Choirs and other musical groups should continue to meet virtually.
- Life rituals (weddings & funerals) should be postponed if at all possible or held virtually. Graveside services should be limited to no more than 10 people including clergy and professional officials. Always work with funeral directors and families when making decisions.

### **Church Offices and Services in RED Status**

- Churches should encourage all employees and volunteers to continue to work from home, and offices should continue to suspend in-person services. Pastors and personnel should meet only virtually or by phone.

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- Only when necessary and approved in advance by the pastor, essential church staff (paid/volunteer) may be in the office for limited hours. Office hours can be resumed if work area and in-person contact allow for the proper physical distancing of 6-10 feet.
- Pastors and staff should model proper healthy requirements at all times during Red Status. Staff should wear masks, engage in frequent handwashing, pause in their work for regular wipe downs of the office/equipment (including personal computers and phones).
- All employees, volunteers, and visitors should be advised and trained on proper protective requirements, and signs should be posted to reinforce healthy behaviors.
- Visitors and team functions should be limited to essential workers only. Provide masks for those visiting the office.
- Place hand-sanitizing stations throughout your facility, including at all entrance/exit areas.
- Check with your insurance carrier to see if they have any particular guidelines for your church to follow.
- Mechanical systems should be adjusted as needed.

### **Meetings and Programs in RED Status**

- Church councils, finance teams, staff parish relations, trustees, and other administrative/operational leadership teams are strongly encouraged to meet. Meetings should be held online. Unless there is a compelling and urgent reason, in-person meetings should be held to a minimum and consist of fewer than 10 people. When meeting in person, all participants are required to wear masks and maintain physical distancing of 6-10 feet. Hand sanitizers should be provided.
- Small groups, programs, and generational meetings, such as Bible study, UMW, Age Level Ministries (confirmation, youth group), recovery groups, and other small groups should meet online. Children, youth, and ministries with a vulnerable population should gather on-line only. No Nursery or spaces that host children and youth should be accessed at this time.

## Church Finances in RED Status

- Encourage online giving directly to your church through a reputable e-giving source.
- Be sure you are inviting and encouraging people to maintain their contributions as best they are able.
- Building access for renters and other building users must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Pastor and Leadership and should be limited to essential purposes only. All building users must be informed and abide by Red Status protocols. Decision-makers should also consider the liability of the church. Contact your insurer for recommendations.
- Money counters and other finance related staff/volunteers should be trained on safe practices for handling money, checks, and other documents.

## Preparing the Building for YELLOW Status:

### Church leaders should start:

- Organizing sanitation or cleaning teams, policies, and practices for all areas that will be used when churches resume in-person activity.
- Mark-off the worship space to ensure people are seated 6-10 feet apart.
- Discuss holding multiple services to reduce the number of people present. Consider requiring registration in advance, to minimize the possibility of people being turned away.
- Determine what practices will be used for offering collection, communion, baptism, and greeting to ensure the maximum protection of all members of the church.
- Determine how to continue offering services for the most vulnerable populations who will be encouraged to stay home until GREEN STATUS returns.
- Continue to provide masks, hand sanitizer, soap, disinfectant wipes, spray and cleaner for staff, building users and unexpected visitors
- Deep clean the entire church. While it is recognized that churches have been empty for weeks and the virus has limited potency after certain periods of time, deep-cleaning brings peace of mind and shows an abundance of care on the part of the church.

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- Replace all HVAC filters (furnace, air conditioning, air cleaner devices) and increase the frequency of filter replacement. HVAC thermostats should be adjusted or programmed so that air is not blowing when groups are gathering.
- Consider shampooing carpets. This time of facility care should focus on preparing entryways, external areas, and internal spaces for the return of congregants and visitors that were reached through virtual church and community care.
- Sanitize all touchpoints in the church, including, but not limited to:
  - pews, rails, tables, chairs, desks, keyboards, phones, music instruments, faucets, screens, bathroom fixtures, office equipment, kitchen appliances, toys, games, handles, doorknobs, water fountains, light switches, microphones, A/V equipment.
  - Provide access to sanitizing wipes so individuals can wipe down spaces with which they come into contact.
- Pay special attention to the nursery/preschool/children's areas. An increased level of care is deeply appreciated by families. Use this time to remove worn/broken toys and other clutter. If these projects require teams, maintain physical distancing, mask-wearing, shift work, etc.
- Post signage related to hygiene and new social practices like shaking hands, physical distancing, and non-contact greetings.
- Post reminders and ways of practicing safe distancing at all entrances and throughout your building. Place these reminders above water fountains, in restrooms, and other high traffic areas.
- Publish several weeks in advance of gathering. Communicate to your congregation and community. Whether through Facebook, email, flyers on doors/windows, a letter to the editor—tell your congregation and community how you are preparing the church for their return.

For recommendations on cleaning:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>
- [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening\\_America\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf)
- [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/ReOpening\\_America\\_Cleaning\\_Disinfection\\_Decision\\_Tool.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/ReOpening_America_Cleaning_Disinfection_Decision_Tool.pdf)

## 4. YELLOW STATUS

**Yellow Status begins when state and local officials have reported a 14-day downward trend of cases, hospitals are treating patients without crisis care, and there is a robust testing program in place, including antibody testing, and there is no evidence of a rebound in case of numbers in your local area. It is anticipated this could extend for several months.**

As the MSC, we want to “Do Good” as restrictions begin to be lifted in the community. This means a gradual return to gatherings and doing so in a cautionary manner. Pastors and church leaders must ensure that implementing Yellow Status is in the spiritual and physical well-being of the community and the church, and will require the approval of the Bishop or her designee.

Even as we enter Yellow Status, high-risk individuals should practice sheltering in place. This would include people over 60, those with underlying conditions or other vulnerabilities, those who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, and those who have been exposed to someone COVID-19 positive in the last 14 days. This includes clergy, staff, volunteers, parishioners, and guests.

Currently and through the month of May 2020, the Crisis Response Team will be continually monitoring and gauging conditions across the Mountain Sky Conference. Note: Churches should maintain safety and sanitation practices of Red Status as you enter into Yellow Status.

**COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN** to reduce confusion to allow each aspect of church life: worship, word and table, sacraments, small groups, and administration to flow as smoothly and safely as possible.

### Worship in YELLOW Status

- **All vulnerable individuals should continue to worship from home** and churches should make every effort to serve homebound individuals. If maximum social distancing and item/surface sanitization are not possible, churches should continue to find an alternative way of worshiping.



- **Continue to share worship online for those who are high-risk** and cannot or choose not to return even if precautions are in place.
- **Churches with over 50 in average worship attendance:** Continue holding online worship, record from home or sanctuary with participation only in small groups. If there are multiple services, plan for managing the number of people per service. Consider small group worship or other alternatives.
- **Churches with under 50 average worship attendance** with great caution may consider holding in-person worship, but need to provide maximum physical distancing of 6-10 feet and personal protection measures should be exercised. See Yellow Status for recommendations. Contingency plans for overflow beyond the approved number of people are critical.
- HVAC units should be turned off prior to the arrival of the gathering to minimize the transfer of droplets in the air.

Create a team to plan for every phase of entering the building to include:

- Train greeters and volunteers for every point in the guest's journey from the parking lot to a designated entrance.
- Providing maximum physical distancing is required.
- Hand sanitizer and masks at all entrances are required. Disposable gloves and sanitizing wipes should be available if requested.
- The entrance to worship space must include clearly marked seating to maintain maximum physical distancing.
- Direct individuals entering and exiting the worship area.
- Signage to inform and educate along the way.
- **All contact surfaces must be sanitized after use**, including but not limited to:
  - backs and sides of pews and chairs,
  - Pulpit, lectern, altar/table,
  - rails handle, doorknobs, push-plates, press bars, water fountains, light switches,
  - microphones, A/V equipment,
  - church vehicles and equipment,
  - tables,
  - office furniture & equipment, computers, calculators, copiers, etc.,
  - telephones,
  - music instruments,

- all restroom surfaces, fixtures, dispensers, knobs, grab rails,
- kitchen surfaces, equipment appliances, etc.
- toys, games,
- Bibles & Hymnals.
- Have a plan in place to provide adequate time and supplies for assigned people to clean and sanitize exposed surfaces before and after building uses.

## **Clergy & Worship Leaders in YELLOW Status**

**Worship should be designed to have as few leaders as possible** and to provide as few individual movements as possible.

**Wearing of cloth face masks is required** while inside the church building (even while leading worship) as is also recommended in public spaces.

**Physical Distancing:** Have people spread out in the sanctuary space. Allow only one family unit per pew with measured markers indicating the proper physical distance in approved and marked seating areas. Explore meeting in a fellowship hall or outdoors if the sanctuary is small.

**Baptisms:** No skin-to-skin contact is advised and masks should be worn by all over age 2. Parents should hold babies and small children, as the pastor performs the rite.

**Communion/Eucharist:** Physical distancing is required during the distribution of elements for communion. Each church should develop a plan for the safest possible handling of this sacrament. Here are two possible options.

- One recommendation is to participate in the Great Thanksgiving at the service end providing individual cups and bread. These must be provided by gloved stewards and placed in the recipient's open hands upon exiting at the end of the service. This may mean some congregations will choose to further postpone offering in-person communion.
- One or more tables can be placed near the exit of the worship space with pre-packaged elements or offered in/on a disposable container for each individual. Hand sanitizer should be placed

at each end of the table with a wastebasket placed nearby. Honoring social distancing, individuals will be directed when they may take communion. Gloved and masked stewards should place the elements on the table for each person.

**Singing and liturgical responses are high-risk practices.** Choirs are not allowed until Green Status. A cloth mask is unlikely to be enough to protect even when practicing appropriate physical distancing for congregational singing. The recommendation is to eliminate singing and liturgical responses in the sanctuary while the congregation is gathered.

**Use no-touch alternatives** for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Remove pew Bibles, hymnals, and friendship pads especially for multiple services. Use bulletins (do not reuse) or screens as alternatives.

One person should be designated to **record the names of those present**, not only for attendance but in the event that contact tracing is needed.

**At children's time**, children should not come forward. Instead, create from you-to-the-pew story moments engaging children from safe distancing.

**Do not offer fellowship/coffee hour.** Food and drink hospitality only resumes at GREEN STATUS.

**At the end of service**, direct people row by row to leave the building to maintain physical distancing. The Pastor should not stand at a door to greet people. If possible, exit from an alternate door or remain seated at the front of the church.

Funerals, memorials, weddings, graduation, and confirmation gatherings should be postponed if at all possible. Otherwise, strictly limit guests and keep a proper physical distance. Plan in advance for each aspect of these events.

**Small Groups and Faith Formation:**

- You may offer both in-person and online opportunities for Bible studies and small groups. It is recommended to maintain online options for at-risk populations and those who are not ready to return to in-person gatherings.

- **Youth and children's activities** like Vacation Bible School (VBS), mission trips, and lock-ins should not be offered until GREEN STATUS is attained. Consider offering an online, mailed or no-touch drop-off activity for children and youth.

## Church Administration in YELLOW Status

- Continue to encourage a work from home option for regular office functions (beyond essential business). Plan in advance to arrange workspaces to ensure employees may resume work safely while maintaining physical distancing, wearing masks, and following safety and sanitizing protocols.
- If considering building users/renters (civic groups, philanthropic partnerships, etc.) back into the building, require that they observe gathering limits, safety protocols, and physical distancing. Groups must also participate and/or be held responsible for cleaning and sanitizing their areas.
- The liability of the church should be considered. Contact your insurer for recommendations.
- Gloved and masked greeters should be placed at entrance ways and elevators to open doors and push elevator buttons.

## Preparation for GREEN Status

Church leaders should evaluate and continue to require that:

- Cleaning teams, policies, and practices are implemented for **all** areas that are being used as churches resume in-person work.
- Keep worship space marked off to ensure people are seated six feet from one another.
- Continue to pay attention to local guidance regarding case numbers and community spread.

## 5. GREEN STATUS

**COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN** to reduce confusion allowing each aspect of church life: worship, word and table, sacraments, small groups, and administration to flow as smoothly and safely as possible.

Once local officials in your area have successfully implemented the RED AND YELLOW status requirements, AND there is no evidence of a rebound in case numbers in the local area, AND adequate testing, therapeutic treatments, and vaccines are available at the local level, pastors and church leaders can ensure that implementing GREEN STATUS is in the spiritual and physical well-being of the community. Your church may implement GREEN STATUS guidelines, after the Pastor has consulted with church leadership, the DS, and has the approval of the Bishop or her designee.

GREEN STATUS is the “Do No Harm” phase when the virus is contained and people are safe. Permission will be granted to communities of faith to return to full activity and gatherings will be permitted without restriction. This will be in place only as church leadership is confident in the care of their community of faith. Green lighting for all activities will likely be guided by a testing protocol for asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers, antibody testing, therapeutic drug therapies aggressively caring for those who have contracted COVID-19, and approval and availability of a COVID-19 vaccine.

### Worship Guidelines

Regular church worship may resume and vulnerable populations may resume attending. Food fellowship events may resume. Sanitation practices must remain in place.

### Church Office and Services

Regular church office work and other church-based services may resume, including in-person meetings. Sanitation practices must remain in place.

## Church Buildings

Church buildings and common areas may resume normal regular practices with good sanitation and cleaning being maintained. Community groups, support groups, and other renters may resume regular meetings and events. Weddings and memorial services may resume.

## Ongoing work

### Church leaders should continue:

- Cleaning teams, policies, and practices are implemented for all areas that are being used as churches resume regular activities.
- Churches should take time to review the COVID-19 crisis response and evaluate what worked, what didn't, what can be learned, and practiced should another pandemic occur.
- Churches should develop a financial backup plan should another crisis occur.
- Continue to pay attention to local guidance regarding community health and outbreaks.

The timeline from Yellow Status to Green Status will be guided by an ongoing evaluation of the situation across the states of Mountain Sky. Churches should anticipate and lead toward several weeks (and possibly months) of Yellow Status as we monitor and respond to conditions in real-time.

**In Closing**, it is possible that COVID-19 cases will spike, decrease, and increase again. The Bishop's Office and Crisis Response Team will assess the threat and issue a return to the appropriately restrictive status.

COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN to reduce confusion to allow each aspect of church life: worship, word and table, sacraments, small groups, and administration to flow as smoothly and safely as possible.

Please send your questions for clarification and comments to: [covid19response@mtnskyumc.org](mailto:covid19response@mtnskyumc.org). This document will be regularly reviewed and updated.



## REFERENCES USED FOR GUIDELINES

Desert Southwest Conference of The United Methodist Church. “Church Opening Guidelines.” Accessed May 12, 2020. <https://dscumc.org/church-opening-guidelines/>

Iowa Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. “Crisis Response Re-Entry Plan.” Accessed May 12, 2020. <https://www.iaumc.org/newsdetail/iowa-annual-conference-of-the-united-methodist-church-crisis-response-re-entry-plan-13653399>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Community & Faith-Based Organizations.” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

UMCOR Global Ministries The United Methodist Church. “Resource: UMCOR “Connecting Neighbors” disaster readiness curriculum.” <https://www.umcmission.org/umcor/learn/news-and-stories/2020/may/resource-umcor-connecting-neighbors-disaster-readiness-curriculum>

# PART II: BEYOND THE GUIDELINES

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Watch the Video

- **VIDEO LINK:** <https://vimeo.com/418628416>
- **PRESENTER:** Bishop Karen Oliveto
- **VIDEO SUMMARY:**
  - The decision to (re)Launch has to take into consideration a sobering reality: A COVID-19 world and church will look different from what we once knew. New health guidelines will require changes in how we used to do things. Some of them are core to our identity as a United Methodist congregation.
  - Some of us have experienced a great deal of trauma as a result of COVID-19: some of us have lost loved ones, some have lost jobs and livelihoods. There are familiar ways of walking in the world that now carry great risk.
  - As a congregation, the very things that we loved most about being a part of a church will need to change. That carries with it a lot of grief as we redefine who we are in light of God's call to be a witness of the Good News of the Gospel in our communities

### Group Discussion Questions

- What do you love most about your church?
- What have been some of the most difficult aspects of this COVID-19 era for you personally? For you and your congregation?
- What are some losses that you have experienced as a result of COVID-19?
- What are some losses that you and your church have experienced as a result of COVID-19?
- Bishop Karen discusses the wilderness wandering of the Hebrew people as well as the story of Lazarus as two scriptures that provide guidance and meaning for her as we ponder our next congregational steps. What scriptures give you guidance?
- What are ways you and your congregation can provide rituals, liturgies, and other means to help your congregational members

and families corporately and individually name the grief/loss and begin healing towards our new normal?

## Resources

- **Grief Leadership During Covid-19.** “Understanding people’s reactions to the losses associated with tragic events inform the roles that leaders can play in support of recovery. In the aftermath of traumatic events, many people want to hear guidance from their community or organization leaders. During pandemics, leaders must attend to many responsibilities, including effective communication to those in their communities who have questions, seek reassurance, want to take action, or just want to know they are not alone in their grief.”
  - [https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS\\_FS\\_Grief\\_Leadership\\_During\\_COVID19.pdf](https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Grief_Leadership_During_COVID19.pdf)
- **Simple Activities for Children and Adolescents:**
  - <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/simple-activities-children-and-adolescents>
- **COVID-19 RESPONSE RESOURCES (Spiritual Resources):**
  - <https://www.philly.bible/disaster-relief>
- **Grief and COVID-19: Mourning our bygone lives.** “The COVID-19 pandemic is an epidemiological crisis, but also a psychological one. While the situation provokes anxiety, stress, and sadness, it is also a time of collective sorrow, says Sherry Cormier, Ph.D., a psychologist who specializes in grief and grief mentoring. ‘It’s important that we start recognizing that we’re in the middle of this collective grief. We are all losing something now... The pandemic has led to a series of losses, from our sense of safety to our social connections to our financial security. Psychologists point to ways we can heal.”
  - <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/04/grief-covid-19>
- **“To Open or Not to Open: Is That the Question?”** video with Bishop Karen
  - <https://www.facebook.com/MountainSkyUMC/videos/353349384001232/?t=0>

## 2. FLIGHT PLAN & DESIGN

### Watch the Video:

- **VIDEO LINK:** <https://vimeo.com/418660542>
- **MODERATOR:** Michael Smith
- **PANELISTS:** Jeremy Scott, Val Jackson, Sarah Rettig, Cindy Snodgrass
- **VIDEO SUMMARY:**

As we (re)launch church, we find ourselves in a new world now -- a new normal -- that will be very different. Before every (re)launch, there are two things we need: a flight plan including a destination, and a vehicle. It's time to dream, design, build, test, and redesign until everything works.

- The panel addressed current challenges and hopes about what a new 'normal' might be.
- Sarah Rettig and Cindy Snodgrass shared about our rural church context, the challenges and strengths in rural ministry, and what we must remember about rural ministry as we move forward together.
- Val Jackson shared about the perspective of our ethnic and other marginalized faith communities. She invited us to consider our future through a different and helpful lens.
- The panel discussed shared learnings about the challenges of living fully into our mission at this time. Jeremy Scott brought great resources and thoughts on the digital world that we are in, and the power of simple connections.
- The panel concluded with a time of hope sharing and specific ways that they would like to see the church emerge from this time.

### Group Discussion Questions

- For your church, what have you learned about what church should be as you've lived into your mission during the covid-19 restriction?

- What have you done that's working well in this season that you would want to continue?
- What are your hopes for when your church returns?

## Resources

- **What Relaunching the Church Might Look Like Over the Next 3–12 Months.** “We are in the midst of a crisis that is forcing the church to learn a new song and dance... By now the church understands the challenges and obstacles they face. However, with every obstacle and challenge, there is an opportunity and solution. As Ed noted at the onset of this crisis, this is the church's moment. Truly, this is our missional moment where we have the glaring opportunity to shift the posture of our churches from monuments, managers, and disseminators of religious goods to a missional movement dispensing and demonstrating gospel hope.”
  - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/what-relaunching-church-might-look-like-over-next-312-month.html>
- **GCORR (UMC General Commission on Race & Religion)** interviews persons of color to get a perspective on the particular inequities facing communities of color.
  - <https://www.gcorr.org/cares-act-and-racial-inequity/>
- Ministry extends to our continual learning about ourselves and others - consider this online course from GCORR (The Cabinet & Board of Ordained Ministry took this course and found it highly valuable):
  - <https://www.gcorr.org/online-course-implicit-bias/>
- A story of hearing each person's story as unique and how to be in a true community:
  - [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

## Our Flight Plan & Design

**DESCRIBE OUR DESTINATION** - Write a vision of what you **hope** worship, congregational life, and mission will look like in the new normal.

**OUTLINE OUR DESIGN** - Write a list of elements of church life that should be changed given our new normal. Include, but do not limit to, health and safety concerns.

**RECRUIT OUR ENGINEERS** - For the above list, write who will be responsible for implementing the vision described above.



### 3. PRE-FLIGHT PREPARATION

#### Watch the Video

- **VIDEO LINK:** <https://vimeo.com/418630706>
- **MODERATOR:** Jeff Rainwater
- **PANELISTS:** Margaret Hotze, Tyler Amundson, Nathan Adams, Steve Easterday McPadden, Amy Go
- **VIDEO SUMMARY:**
  - Every flight has a pre-flight checklist to make sure everything is prepared and operational. It seems like we are in that time now: counting down until we prepare for our relaunch. But more than ticking away the time, we should be preparing and checking to make sure everything is in place.
  - In making plans, communication is key as is setting expectations and being honest about setbacks and mistakes. Keep everyone informed!
  - There are many possibilities about using traditional practices in a new way, like music, offerings, and the sacraments, but it will take some creativity and working through differences of opinion.
  - One panelist shared what his church has learned from an experiment in an early opening.
    - Bring lay leaders and staff into the decision-making process early.
    - Be cautious.
    - There is no going “back” to what was and there is no use staying where we are. Onward!
  - Finally, a big question that was on the minds of most: how do we turn these new online audiences into disciples?

#### Group Discussion Questions

- We need to talk about the building and keeping our people safe. What do we need to do to keep people safe? Do we have all in place to accomplish this?
- What is your checklist for making worship meaningful with the restrictions that may still be in place?
- What is your checklist for engaging your new worshippers in the wider life of the congregation? (How will they make friends and

feel belonging? How will they grow in their faith beyond worship?)

## **Resources**

- **Don't Reopen Until You've Thought About These Three Things.**
  - <https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=hflTIPbtpk>

## **Pre-Flight Checklist**

Using the Health & Safety Guidelines, Other Resources, and Your Group Conversation, create a complete Pre-Flight Checklist, including the following:

1. Health & Safety Protocols for Worship
2. Health & Safety Protocols for Other Church Facility Use
3. Health & Safety Protocols for Outside Church Gatherings
4. Inclusion of all persons in in-church events
5. Worship, including addressing risks of singing and choirs
6. Pastoral Care
7. Discipleship
8. Stewardship
9. Missions
10. Sacraments
11. Funerals
12. Community meals and potlucks

## 4. LIFTOFF

### Watch the Video

- **VIDEO LINK:** <https://vimeo.com/418639787>
- **MODERATOR:** Annie Arnoldy
- **PANELISTS:** Amy Gearhart, Amy Strader, Barry Welliver, George Goree, Sarah Merchant
- **VIDEO SUMMARY:**
  - Liftoff is often the most thrilling stage of any launch. It's also the most critical. To lift the most weight and counter the most inertia, we need the most thrust/acceleration. All this causes the most stress.
  - Similarly, the launch can be both an exciting and very stressful time for the church. In this conversation, we want to focus on two elements -- the resources (fuel) needed for launch, and minimizing weight (letting go), in order to have a successful launch.
  - This is a "high-mess" phase of our ministry. It is a space of both/and -- the new reality will include both online ministry *and* new ways of gathering in person.
  - Communication is key as churches begin to lift-off again. Access to resources and information is important to understanding missional reasons behind gathering again. Sharing safety guidelines, and becoming familiar with phases of a crisis, are essential to all of our ministry practices.
  - Gathering small is the new way of being together. Weather-permitting, small gatherings outside are one of the measures churches can explore. How can leaders rise up to care for the new online communities that have emerged, as well as, care for people in small groups?
  - What, of our old ways, needs to be left behind? It's unanimous - innovate to streamline meetings and business so that the focus remains on acting toward the mission & vision of the church!

### Resources

- Visit Praxis Labs for innovative ideas, articles and more (<https://journal.praxislabs.org>)

## RE(LAUNCH) CHURCH: a study guide for considering church in a covid-19 world

- The Redemptive Edge Podcast - from the creators of Praxis Labs (<https://podcast.praxislabs.org/the-redemptive-edge#redemptive-edge-shows>)
- Phases of a Crisis (<https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/recovering-disasters/phases-disaster>)

### Group Questions

- Name the 'fuel' you need to take off the way your church needs especially short-term resources needed in this season of relaunch?
- What 'bags' need to be left in the terminal to lighten your load?
- How do we honor and say good-bye to what we need to leave behind?

### Fuel & Weight - A Plan

List the critical resources ('fuel'), including people, money, and others, that will be needed for liftoff. Which are most critical and what is the plan for acquiring needed 'fuel'?

What extra weight (old practices, attitudes, items) need to be left behind to lighten the load for (re)launch?

## 5. FLIGHT

### Watch the Video

- **VIDEO LINK:** <https://vimeo.com/418674677>
- **MODERATOR:** Jeff Rainwater
- **PANELISTS:** Tiffany Keith, Betty Nguyen, Jim Barth
- **VIDEO SUMMARY:**
  - Now, we are in the air. How do we stay there? Let's talk about sustainability. Once we've launched, how do we keep the new thing in the air?
  - One of the biggest issues of sustainability is how to keep online activities going once other in-person activities begin to ramp up. More trained volunteers will be needed.
  - What was most exciting to the panelists is the spirit of experimentation this has created within our churches. There is much we need to change not just because of Covid-19 but also for vital congregational life. We know we can do it now, because we have this season as an example.

### Group Questions

1. Let's talk destination. Map out progress goals for the next 3 months, 6 months, 1 year.
2. Let's talk about sustainability. Who is responsible for each of the goals above? What do they need to achieve their goal?
3. Let's talk in-flight entertainment. How do we take care of each other in this journey? How do we celebrate along the way?
4. Let's talk turbulence. What are the challenges you can foresee ahead?

## Staying in the Sky

List Flight goals set by leaders for 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, including who is responsible for each goal.

What is needed in order to achieve each progress marker?

How will achievements be honored and celebrated in this time of restricted social gatherings? Plan celebration events and moments of recognition.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

### Watch the Video

- VIDEO LINK: <https://vimeo.com/418685441>
- MODERATOR: BISHOP KAREN OLIVETO
- PANELISTS: Michael Smith, Annie Arnoldy, Jeff Rainwater
- VIDEO SUMMARY:
  - Bishop Karen and our moderators from the previous panel discussions park this effort into orbit with some key learnings for (re)launching church in our covid-19 world. We hope this resource helps you plan to keep your congregations healthy and safe and prepare for new, creative, ways of doing ministry in our new normal.

### Group Discussion Questions

- How do we continue our theological reflection through each stage of the ReLaunch?
- Where might God show up as we grieve the losses of what used to be?
- As a people of grace & faith, how do we hold to our new best practices as each of these stages ebbs and flows?
- Isaiah 43:19 says: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" What are you and your congregation perceiving? Finish this phrase:
  - "The new thing I see God doing in our church is \_\_\_\_\_."
  - "The new thing I see God doing in our world is \_\_\_\_\_."
  - "The new thing I see God doing in my life is\_\_\_\_\_."