



(re)LAUNCH CHURCH

(re)considering church
in a covid-19 world

MSC (Re) Launch Church Study Guide 2.0 **Addendum 11.14.2020**

A letter from your MSC Ministry in a Time of COVID Management Task Force

Nov. 14, 2020

Dear Clergy and Lay Leaders of the Mountain Sky Conference,

We greet you in the love of our Savior Jesus Christ! Thank you for your innovation and creativity during this challenging time. We, and your parishioners, appreciate all you are doing amidst the constraints and anxiety of this moment. Our hope is to give you some updated directions amid the continued COVID pandemic. We have heard from many that the guidelines developed in March and April when the pandemic began may no longer suit our needs now ten months into this crisis. While the guidelines were written with the best information at the time, we agree some changes are needed.

As we have lived through this pandemic, a few things have become clear. The COVID19 virus is primarily passed through droplets in the air. So, anything we can do to limit the transfer of these droplets is important. Wearing masks, social distancing, good hand hygiene, and diligent cleaning of frequently touched surfaces continue to be our best defenses. These are non-negotiable for us as people called to do no harm and offer hope for the world. Minimizing room capacity and limiting time together inside are also important considerations.

[A summary of CDC guidelines for gatherings can be found online.](#)

Each of our communities and churches is unique. There are many metrics for determining when we should continue or suspend in-person worship and gatherings: new cases, positivity rate, hospitalizations, case load, 7-day trend, community spread. We recognize these metrics are an ever-moving target for decision making. We have updated our guidelines with the knowledge we have today seeking to take into account each unique context. As always, we encourage you to consult your county public health department and your state guidelines as you consider your COVID19 protocols. In the attached addendum describe these and other changes to our guidelines.

Keep in mind the appointed clergy have final authority regarding worship in the local church per the Book of Discipline 2533. Please take the authority granted you by the Bishop to both care for your community's soul and their physical health.

We are in it with you!

The MSC Ministry in a Time of COVID-19 Management Task Force

ADDENDUM TO (RE) LAUNCH GUIDELINES

Introduction

The statements below list the significant changes made to the (re)Launch guidelines by the MSC Ministry in a Time of COVID-19 Management Task Force, effective Nov. 22, 2020.

MSC Crossroads Resource

Hearing a need for a way to share resources related to congregations' covid-19 response, and seeing a need for leaders across our conference to network with each other, the Mountain Sky Conference has launched Mountain Sky Ministry Crossroads -- a private social media platform organized around ministry topics and affinities.

Currently, there are topics aligned with the covid-19 task force's five work areas:

- Discipleship: Invite & Welcome & Grow
- Ministry in Digital Spaces
- Mission to Neighbor & World
- Well-being & Self-Care
- Worship & Preaching

More topics will be added later as Crossroads' use expands. To join Crossroads, go to mtnskyumc-crossroads.mn.co and click on the red Request to Join button. A moderator will accept your request within a day. Inside, members can view and respond to posts and articles offered by the covid-19 team or others as well as make contributions themselves.

Local COVID statistics

The COVID-19 Task Force has recommended a change in the definition of Yellow Status, originally defined in Section 4, to the following:

Yellow Status begins when county, state and local officials have reported a consistent testing positivity rate less than or equal to 4%. The positivity rate can be found using this resource document listed below which is updated regularly. Additionally, other factors such capacity for local hospitals, testing program, and county and/or state guidelines should be considered.

View your county's test positivity rate at the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) webpage. [This is the website link that is updated by CMS.](#)

Guidance for use of HVAC systems is mentioned throughout the guidelines. The following offers additional information for this season.

HVAC - Now that it is getting colder outside and we want to move gatherings inside, it is important to consider how you will heat your buildings. The data is inconsistent and contradictory on HVAC systems and air distribution. Anyway that you can increase outdoor air inside helps dissipate the virus. According to the CDC, we should adjust our HVAC systems to increase the percentage of outdoor air to reduce COVID air transmission. If your building has the capability of ventilation, please consider increasing the outdoor air percentage and run the system to exchange all the air in the room prior to gatherings and after, for two hours as suggested by CDC.

[COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings](#)

[Air Purifiers, Fans, and Filters: A COVID-19 Explainer for Schools](#)

Further helpful information not originally in the guidelines follows:

Plexiglass – Plexiglass has become common practice in businesses around town to create an additional barrier, especially when social distancing can't be maintained. In the case of preaching and other worship leaders, make sure the barrier is large enough to make a difference. A small square of plexiglass in front a speaker is unlikely to prevent transmission. And certainly, it would be ill-advised to have multiple people in front of the plexiglass without masks. Plexiglass is not to be used in place of masks and social distancing, but in addition to. For regular speaking, 6' distance is recommended between people. For public speaking (projecting) and singing at least 25' distance is recommended.

Resources:

[American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#)

[Resuming Care-filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic](#)

[Masks keep churches from being superspreaders. But they make sermons tough](#)

CARES Act - We would like to clarify some conditions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. If you work for a church you are eligible for paid sick leave, providing you have a stay-at-home order or a quarantine order from a health care provider. This is sick

leave, NOT a virtual work situation. [Please review the poster to determine your availability.](#)

Medical exemptions to wearing a mask

[COVID-19 and Masks: Doctor, May I Be Excused? By Kathleen Doheny – WebMD](#)

[COVID-19 ALERT: Fraudulent Facemask Flyers “Exempt” Cards not Authorized by U.S. Department of Justice](#)

Recommendation about food/potlucks/coffee hour/food sales

There should be no food shared, potlucks or coffee hours at least through January 2021.

According to CDC:

Lowest risk: Meetings and other activities are conducted virtually. Only essential activities (i.e., provision of essential services) occur in person.

More risk: Small, in-person gatherings like board meetings or support groups are held. Outdoor activities and meetings are prioritized. Individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and do not share objects. No food is served at meetings or events. Most staff telework and if staff or stakeholders are present in a facility, they are required to wear masks (if able) and maintain social distancing. Rigorous cleaning and disinfecting practices are implemented. Attendees at the organization’s meeting and events come from the same local geographic area (e.g., community, town, city, county).

Higher risk: Indoor activities are held. Medium-sized in-person gatherings are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart. In CBO facilities, common areas are closed, and staff is encouraged to wear masks (if able) and maintain social distancing. Food is served in pre-packaged boxes with disposable utensils to eliminate the need for shared items or congregating around serving tables. For meetings and events, a limited number of attendees come from outside the local geographic area.

Highest risk: Standard operations and programming are resumed. Large in-person gatherings are held where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet

apart. Food is served “potluck” or family style. Many event attendees come from outside the local geographic area.

[Source: Considerations for Community Based Organizations – Food Service](#)

Regarding food sales, the CDC states:

- There is no evidence that people can get COVID-19 from eating food. However, sharing utensils and congregating around food service areas may present risks.
- If food is offered at any meeting or event, have individual, pre-packaged boxes or bags instead of a potluck, buffet, or family-style meal. Avoid sharing of foods and utensils.
- If the organization hosts an event that includes food service, refer to CDC’s COVID-19 considerations for [restaurants and bars](#).
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals not from the same household remain at least 6 feet apart when waiting in line to order or pick up.
- Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Individuals should [wash their hands](#) after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.

When someone in your congregation tests positive after meeting at the church

All people who were in that person’s presence should be notified.

According to the CDC:

[Anyone who has had close contact with someone with COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days after their last exposure to that person.](#)

[However, anyone who has had close contact with someone with COVID-19 and who meets the following criteria does NOT need to stay home.](#)

- [Has COVID-19 illness within the previous 3 months and](#)
- [Has recovered and](#)
- [Remains without COVID-19 symptoms \(for example, cough, shortness of breath\)](#)

Outdoor worship guidelines

As we enter Advent and Christmas seasons, providing an in-person experience of worship ought to be outdoors.

- All applicable guidelines listed in the (re)Launch should be followed. If people will not be remaining in their cars, special consideration must be given to directing people from the parking lots to the outdoor setting while physically distancing, as well as indicating where people can sit/stand.
- Guests should bring their own lawn chair/blanket to minimize the shared use of chairs and other items (umbrellas, etc.).
- At least 6 feet of distance between parties is still required.

Important considerations for clergy and other church leaders:

While you are healthy, consider asking the following questions:

- What is your plan to care for someone in your family (e.g., a spouse, child, parent) who may develop full-blown symptoms related to COVID-19?
- What is your plan for offering spiritual and organizational leadership for your church if you were to get sick? What is your chain of command– who steps in if the key decision maker becomes incapacitated? Perhaps you reach out to a church within the connection to see if they would be willing to serve as your congregation’s spiritual resource should you become ill (e.g., offering online streaming worship and pastoral care to your congregation in addition to their own, etc.)?
- What are the essentials for your faith community? What must continue?