



Please Read : Document Purpose

Sources:

- Compiled from conversations with 25+ pastors plus blog/posts & podcasts. All credit to those leaders.

Perceptions and Expectations of People:

- This document purposefully does not address CDC or state requirements. (Those are readily available.)
- Your reopening plan is built on creating a safe environment for people to actually want to return.
- The plan should be based on the perceptions of your most vulnerable, nervous congregants and guests, the elderly and young parents, of providing a safe and respectful environment.
- Regardless of state requirements, these are critical “known” perceptions that must be addressed:
 - Option for each person to maintain a minimum of 6’ of distancing throughout the facility.
 - Kids ministry will not reopen in the initial phases (perhaps until schools resume).
 - Small Groups/Sunday School classes cannot meet in typical smaller, closed classrooms.
 - Touching of people and objects (hymnals, offering baskets, greeters, etc.) is not advised. Throughout culture, the phrase is now a “contactless experience”.

Why Plan Now (Regardless of Your Actual Opening Date):

- Most states are accelerating their timelines for the reopening of churches.
- Develop a comprehensive congregational communication plan specifically in the when and how of your phased re-openings (plan in advance for multiple phases to occur). This plan needs to address both those who believe openings should happen immediately & those who believe it is too soon.
- Communications need to prepare the congregation for the significant logistical changes they can expect.
- Your plan helps provide a framework for changes you should make now in your streaming broadcasts to prepare the congregation for new realities (such as adding kids content into the adult service).

Phased Approached:

- The goal is that while your plan should be developed with multiple phased re-openings, regardless of your size or area, the thoughts in this document are simply brainstorming, potential checklists to add to various phases of your plan. Your phases should consider: Office opening, staff hours, non-worship service facility use, worship services, small groups/Sunday school, hospitality, volunteers access, etc.

Personal Note:

Myself, and our small team, are ministry men and women, passionate about each local church being more intentional in their Biblical mission to reach and grow disciples. We serve alongside churches of literally all sizes, denominations, & styles, helping leadership teams in their mission through strategic planning, fundraising, technology, worship services, guest experiences, & volunteerism. Please feel free to reach out on any topic you are pondering at the moment. My favorite days are talking ministry.

Daryl Cripe daryl@amplio.group



Reminders First - Before Planning

A Unique Opportunity With Your One:

- As your leadership & congregation attention shifts towards reopening, both your church and also of culture as a whole, do not lose the momentum of encouraging your congregation to be investing in the lives of their neighbors, co-workers, family members, etc., who are not in a relationship with Jesus.
- Throughout churches, we are hearing stories of more personal engagement is happening in the lives of non-believers. Neighbors talking to neighbors. Co-workers checking in on each other. Your congregation is learning what it means to do life with those who do know know or care about Jesus.
- As churches reopen and congregations reunite, your leadership must push that this new evangelistic momentum cannot be lost. It is the mission! It will take intentional steps/communications to maintain.
- Be purposeful in encouraging and sharing real stories of how your people are doing the most basic, simple connection points. Celebrate it, push it, keep this passion alive in your people.
- Continue to regularly provide simple ideas of how your people can engage with others.
- Continue to tell stories of those who are already doing so.

Digital Worship Services & Gatherings

Digital Is Here:

- This is not the end of online worship services or gatherings of groups. Even as restrictions are lifted, we are months away from the full resumption of typical worship gatherings (full seating capacity, kids, etc.).
- Your online service should remain your primary worship experience for the first phases of reopening.
- Maintaining viewership and engagement is going to require increasing intentionality of quality, of intentional use of technology, of content programming, and of personal online interactions.

How Do You Know “When”

Phased Timing:

- When to start reopening should likely consider two factors:
 - Evaluate the risk of a virus resurgence & therefore a return to shutdowns in your community.
 - Are you at risk of your church gathering being the cause of a resurgence (via contact tracing)?
 - We do not want to gather until it can be a great experience for parents with kids, for the elderly, & for new guests. If we cannot have kids ministry or we need restrictions in place for distancing guidelines, that wouldn't be a great experience, especially for anyone who has never been to church before.
- When you start a phased reopening, consider providing two unique services. Continue to record, during the week, a broadcast version of the service (made for watching online) and also provide a live service.



Let's Get Planning

Task Force:

- Recommend establishing a small task force to bring congregational insights & planning to reopening.
- To ensure you are capturing perceptions of people vs. just regulations, purposefully include:
 - High school student, mom of young kids, an elderly senior citizen, a medical professional, etc.
 - One elder/governing board member & key ministry/department staff who will represent leadership.
 - One individual who feels the church should just open immediately & one individual who is genuinely nervous and likely would not return without significant restrictions.
- Develop clear, tangible definitions of each phase of the reopening (online only, online focused/partial in-person, equal online/in-person, emphasis on in-person & online for new guests). This will likely include at least three phases, including plans to return to a previous phase if needed.
- Team will provide recommendations to the church's senior leadership team.

Insurance:

- Check with your insurance carrier to ensure you are covered and/or do not have any legal liabilities of reopening your facility during the pandemic.

Pre-Opening Cleaning:

- During shutdown, have the facility professionally cleaned. Ensure cleaning includes carpets, spraying all surfaces with disinfectant, wiping down all door knobs, toys, books, hymnals, etc., and care is given to kitchens, water faucets/fountains, and restrooms.
- While the virus will no longer be living on these surfaces, it is addressing perception and being able to communicate that the church has been thoroughly and professionally cleaned.

Post-Opening Cleaning:

- An opportunity to develop a new volunteer team to oversee ongoing cleaning:
 - During worship services, facilitate ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of all touched services (door knobs, restrooms, water faucets/fountains, chairs/pews, etc.). Remember, this is about hospitality.
 - After worship service/event, team provides a thorough cleaning before next service.

Ministry Volunteers:

- Some volunteers, especially older volunteers, will initially feel uncomfortable in resuming their roles given the perception of increased risk. It is ok for them to feel this way.
- Identify which ministries & which ministry roles will be required during the phased reopening.
 - Worship, technology, greeters/ushers, security, cleaning, etc.
- Begin conversations with each volunteer in those required roles to identify who will resume & who would prefer to wait until a future time to start their roles.
- Build a revised plan on how to operate with your reduced number of volunteers plus supplementing with volunteers from other ministries that are not reopening.



Let's Get Planning continued

Masks & Sanitizer:

- Establish whether masks will be required by all individuals entering the facility.
 - If not, prepare a statement for how you will address those who refuse to wear one and for people who are angry that some people are not wearing them. Be relational to both perceptions.
- Determine if masks will be provided at the entrance to all those who would like one.
- Provide no-touch hand sanitizer stations (vs. traditional bottles of sanitizers). Ensure proper signage at entrances and hallways related to illness, where to find sanitizer, exceptions of distancing, etc.

No-Touch Alternative Elements:

- If bulletins are offered, ensure they are single use (vs. individuals returning them to the pile).
- Offering baskets are replaced with multiple collection boxes spread throughout the space.
 - Continue communicating online options as preferred (text, automatic withdraw, PushPay, etc.).
- Communion is offered via pre-packaged sets, at multiple distribution points.
- Hymnals and Bibles are removed from pews/seats and all song/scripture references are provided on one-time use sheets or on screens.
- Coffee is only provided if pre-served and is available in multiple locations within the lobby spaces.
- Activities provided for kids, such as coloring pages/crayons are single-use.

Facility:

- Remove tables & chairs from lobby spaces that promote congregating in close spaces.
- Ensure HVAC is continuously run or keep doors and windows open to increase outside air circulation.
- Volunteers should be positioned outside of restrooms to regulate the number of individuals inside.
- Close portions of the facility that are not required (such as kids rooms) to limit exposure, but also the need to continuously clean those area.
- Post signs to encourage those who are high risk or had known exposure remain outside the facility.

Communications:

- Develop a communication plan for the what, how, and when to phase reopening, expectations of those attending, as well as what they can expect of the church, of worship services, and of ministries.
- Communicate plan in multiple formats (digital, snail mail, through leadership, etc.) prior to reopening.
- Establish specific way for individuals to respond with questions or concerns concerning the reopening.
- Update your website to walk guests through how the experience will be contactless and safe.
- Focus all communications to reflect the experience of parents with kids, the elderly, & guests.



Worship Service Considerations

Worship Service Planning:

- During initial phases, continue focus on presenting the service to a camera, your online audience.
- Verbally celebrate those who are watching from home, not those who are in the room.
- If utilizing multiple services on the same day, establish separate entrances and exits with existing doors.
- Greeters positioned both outside the facility (parking lot) and within the lobby away from entrances.
- "Guest Services" area exists but is setup to allow for distancing between hosts & guests.
- No use of choirs or large vocal ensembles on stage.
- No meet-n-greet time for the congregation.
- Research is clearly showing that singing represents one of the highest risks in relation to spreading droplets of the virus. Singing introduces additional distance and suspension in the air at the rate of a sneeze and is not contained within the 6' distancing recommendations. Cloth masks do not protect this. Consideration will have to be given as to whether singing will be utilized in your first phases.
- Incorporate kids programming into the service. This will be beyond a short kids message (they cannot come to the stage), but rather incorporated into music, teaching, and ongoing engagement.
- Given kids in the room, use of masks, distancing, etc., consider services that are less than 60 minutes.
- Continue to provide an "online pastor" role within the chat feeds of your online services.
- Ensure that online guests are welcomed and addressed during the service.

Frequency of Worship Services:

- The easiest way to maintain the required 6' minimum physical distancing that will be expected by people's perceptions, utilize every row of seats/pews and maintain 3 empty seats between family units.
 - NOTE: In reviewing CAD drawings, the above minimums will reduce seating in any room to 25% to 30% of capacity. A room designed for 350 will be reduced to approximately 95 participants.
- Children will be in the worship service until kids ministry is reopened. This adds people to your seating.
- Based on the above, identify # of worship services required to accommodate normal attendance.
 - Shorten services to less than 60 minutes to increase number of services on a single day.
 - Shorten time between service times to lessen lingering time to talk.
 - Experiment with providing worship services on different days (a trend already emerging).
 - Encourage people to continue worshipping online vs. in-person. Celebrate those who are online.
 - Suggest families host viewing parties within their homes (a couple of families watching together).
- Identify how you will regulate who comes to which services (to avoid turning people/guests away).
 - Online ticketing system to ensure above 6' restriction capacity is maintained.
 - Alphabetical services by last name (these letters come to this service time).