



DATE: Wednesday, May 6, 2020
TO: KMN Pastors and Churches
FROM: Network Pastor/Superintendent ~ Joseph S. Girdler, DMin
SUBJECT: Kentucky AG Church Re—Openings

I wrote in the May 2020 “Good News” Special Edition of the Kentucky Challenge, “This plague has shown us how swiftly our lives can change, how delicate our health can be, and how significant our friends and family are to us.... And, it’s time to “...formulate an action plan...for your congregation ...and... for your community. Remember, Jesus didn’t call us to “be” disciples, but to “make” disciples.”

This guide is offered to help you through the various points of consideration as your church implements new methods, policies, procedures, and worship options. I will reiterate and stress the importance of certain points in duplication. In consultation with numerous Superintendents across the United States similar guidelines are being offered to churches across our USA Fellowship. Just as “safer-at-home” orders were implemented in stages, a return to public gatherings will also be implemented in similar stages. Making things even more perplexing for pastors across Kentucky and the nation is the fact that just a few months ago it was the White House offering guidelines. Then, local governors started implementing their own directives. Now, certain local authorities are offering standards either more stringent or less restrictive than their governors. It is truly a challenge to be a pastor in today’s society. Remember, we’re praying for you!

OPENING AT REDUCED PERCENTAGE OF ATTENDANCE

As you are aware, on Wednesday evening, April 29th, Kentucky Governor Beshear announced May 20 (Wednesday) as the initial day -for churches who are ready/prepared **(with restrictions)- to open for indoor and in-person services (and, it is was understood that he was asking for “opening-May 20 at 50%/half-capacity”)**. There is always the chance he may announce 25% capacity or another percentage. If so, how do you

process that? Multiple services? Other options? Wait a little longer? Interesting. **We hope to receive soon further guidance** from the Governor's office as to requested expectations for local churches. **The Governor unveiled a tentative schedule** for resuming operations and has said repeatedly – from his perspective – that churches are not being treated more restrictively than other businesses or organizations. Some have interpreted the Governor's statements to be that a church can open with no restrictions at all. We do not believe that correct. There are most definitely guidelines to be followed. So, please do not expect opening with "business as usual" attendance percentages or ministry context. **Gov. Beshear actually said, "...Where they will be able to do in-person services again at a reduced capacity.** We're working on that. It's likely to be a percentage of the occupancy that is allowed," Beshear said. "All of this is contingent on being able to keep social distancing, on the type of cleaning that needs to occur." (https://www.wpsdlocal6.com/news/beshear-churches-can-reopen-on-may-20-at-reduced-capacity/article_71dd1052-8a78-11ea-80b7-277f1b5c9c29.html)

GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED

We have previously discussed **some of those guidelines that MUST be followed**, so be certain to familiarize yourself with them. You can refer to a number of posts over the last few weeks at our Kentucky A.G. Ministers and Leaders Facebook Group and review details later in this document. This will enable your church to adequately prepare for welcoming church members and visitors back into your facilities. Though we are eager to come back together for worship, fellowship, and ministry as the Body of Christ, if you are not prepared to open for services in accordance with the CDC and KY Governor's restrictions then simply hold off a few more weeks until you are prepared to welcome guests appropriately. It would be better to move a bit slower than to present a plan that cannot actually be carried out.

A WRITTEN PLAN PRE-OPEN-COMMUNICATED TO ATTENDEES

Churches may choose to open on May 20, but our recommendation is that you not open until you HAVE A WRITTEN PLAN based on the restrictions and guidelines **and HAVE COMMUNICATED THAT PLAN** to your congregation. Further, as I've been asked on numerous occasions, **"What about District Affiliated churches?"**

The Kentucky Presbytery has reviewed these matters and this letter in advance. We ask District Affiliated churches to discuss their written plan via direct conversation with their Presbyters before reopening.

Realize that returning to a worship service under these unique and history-making circumstances will be a very different experience than the norm from the last time your parishioners attended the church. Health officials tell us it is important to realize this virus is not going away and remains highly contagious. It is sobering but critical to understand that people we know and love, people in our congregations are still in danger of contracting COVID-19 and some are highly susceptible.

It is important to navigate the healthy tension between what churches CAN do and what churches SHOULD do. We believe wisdom says we should apply I Corinthians 14:40-43 to our present situation: "Let everything be done decently and in order...since God is not a God of disorder..." While the verses refer to orderliness in the worship service, the principle of orderliness in God's house can be applied to our structure, systems, and facilities.

If you can continue to conduct certain meetings or activities from remote / online options (at this time) it is encouraged to do so. Services that houses of worship

cannot conduct in such manner should be handled in strict accordance with the White House and CDC & Prevention guidelines.

The situation in each local church varies, therefore, no church should feel pressured or rushed to reopen and, in fact, no church should resume, “in person” services until a clearly defined workable plan that adheres to the guidelines has been communicated to your congregation.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS / PREPARATIONS

- Some churches will choose not to reopen just yet
- No pastor should feel rushed to open
- A good question to ask ourselves is, “What is driving us to resume in-person services?”
- “What might be the expectations of our church family as they return to in-person services?”
- If you are not ready, don’t open
- If you don’t have a solid written plan, don’t open
- If you have a solid written plan, follow the plan
- What medical professionals can you work with to help develop best practices?
- What areas of the church need extra attention at this time? (door knobs, restrooms...)
- Who can be recruited to assist as new volunteers?
- What resources do they need?
- What ongoing cleaning protocols need to be developed?
- What good habits or new ministry considerations has your church embraced that should continue?
- What should you stop doing?
- Are there budgetary changes that should occur now?
- Have clear signage
- Prop doors open
- Observe strict social distancing (6ft)
- Have hand sanitizer at all entrances
- Masks are optional
 - We recognize there are locations across the state where it is difficult to find hand sanitizer, Lysol or equivalent, masks, etc.
 - Bleach is easier to find which can be used on floors, door handles, bathrooms, etc.
 - If masks cannot be found, cloth masks, as the Governor acknowledged, can be made and passed out.
- No handshakes or hugs
- Consider shortening your normal service time to 1-hour family-friendly services when possible.
- Limit contact during prayer times
- Continue live-streaming (as possible)

SOME APPROACHES YOU MIGHT CONSIDER

- Online services – there are still people that are at risk and who will not feel comfortable leaving their homes, therefore we encourage you to continue offering online services.
- Drive-In services – there are some churches that the best first step will be to continue or begin with drive-in service options. This gets people coming to your site and keeps everyone in a safe environment while you prepare for the re-opening of your buildings.
- Drive-Through Ministry – This will allow for the distribution of communion (self-contained) and allow for personal encouragement and prayer (using restriction guidelines).
- Sanctuary-Service – During this phase you must follow all guidelines. There should be no kids services, pre-school, or nursery care. All children should sit with their families. (Though he has not released them as of this writing, Kentucky Governor Beshear has said he will offer more specific guidelines before May 20.)

MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

Again, it is important you understand **when your church begins to care for and provide ministry to children** (nursery, Sunday School, kids church, youth, Royal Rangers, Girls Ministries, etc. **it will be imperative that you follow closely the Guidance for Child Care Programs guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)).**

WHEN YOU CHOOSE TO REOPEN

As we work diligently in our local contexts to prepare for REOPEN DAY(S), remember to be patient and do the work of the ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. I continue to hear enormous testimonies of churches seeing God's powerful work in and among their labors. It is our prayer as various churches serve their families and communities that God will give you effective and fruitful ministry. Let us encourage and support one another in the spirit of unity. **We are praying that the Lord will give each pastor and leadership team Spirit-led creativity, wisdom, and discernment in all decisions.**

We know infected persons who have few or no symptoms can spread the virus that causes C19 to others. Even if an infected person is only mildly ill, the people they spread it to may become seriously ill, especially if that person is 65 years of age or older with pre-existing health conditions placing them in higher risk.

Please note, public health guidance cannot anticipate every unique situation. You should stay informed and take actions based on common sense and wise judgment that will protect health.

- Reopen only when fully ready. There's no problem in being patient and waiting a few more weeks if your context needs such.
- Communicate as much as possible ahead of time to your church family your guidelines so they will know what to expect

- Let members know you are mitigating the risks, but, there are still risks and if they are not comfortable they should not feel pressured to attend at this time
- Encourage the vulnerable to stay home until a time when they (and, all) are more comfortable. You could provide a “senior service” exclusively for attendees 65 and over to attend in person, as an option.
- Please do not abandon your Online presence for those who can’t / won’t attend in person. Further, recognize often “hundreds” of people who do not regularly attend your church have been watching some or all of your online ministry.
- Instruct sick volunteers, guests, staff, employees to stay home
- Maintain good hygiene by washing your hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, using your elbow to cover coughs, not touching your face, and encouraging elbow or fist-bumps for a season.
- Clean and disinfect work areas frequently

FOR YOUR SANCTUARY SERVICE

- Thoroughly sanitize the church building before the service
- Have hand sanitizer stations at each entrance for attendees
- Masks and gloves should be provided to the greeters who will remain at a 6-foot distance
- Encourage the use of masks by attendees (provided or brought from their homes)
- There will be a “no physical touch” policy and a 6-foot distance will be asked to be followed by all persons not under the same household
- Fellowship and Commons areas are to be closed; no congregating.
- Coffee / food services will not be provided
- As mentioned, no childcare or children’s ministries services provided at this time.
- Families are requested to sit together in the sanctuary and there will be at least two empty seats (or 6 foot separation) between parties in a row except as follows:
- There will be alternative rows between attendees (for instance, every other row left empty)
- Restrooms should be limited in number of persons providing 6 foot distance separation
- Refrain from passing collection plates and instead provide a central collection box in the building where families can pass by individually. Or, encourage and implement/use online giving/text to give.
- As was discussed in our last weekly Zoom meeting, **continue giving altar calls and response opportunities** as we minister the gospel message. In so, consider:
 - 6-ft distances marked at your altars
 - no physical touch (at this time)
 - masks, gloves, as necessary
 - bibles, discipleship, resource materials easily available without needing to have someone pass or hand it physically
 - **for both in-person services and online ministry:**
 - **encourage the “Text ‘JOURNEY’ to 74574”**
 - **encourage “journeyonline.org”**
- At the close of the service, release by rows, or sections, encouraging social distancing – and have people leave promptly to their vehicles.
- Sanitize seats and frequently touched surfaces between services.

- Administer communion without attendees having to touch the same surfaces and objects.

IN CLOSING, PLEASE KEEP IN MIND

- There may be people in your congregation taking **photos and videos**. If you are not following guidelines and these are posted, it could bring serious problems and consequences to the church.
- There is no need for the news media showing up at your church and it appearing you are doing church – as – usual, not adhering to guidelines, no masks, gloves, etc.
- No one wants churches to open and then have a problem that causes closure again
- We are to be wise. The world is watching the church more than businesses. That may not be a bad thing! Let our witness glorify the Lord in all things. And, in unity of the faith, be kind to one another and work to unify the body of Christ rather than divide in confusion or frustrations during such challenging times. I reiterate words from my last week's Supt's Weekly Update: "I encourage you to pause before post. I encourage you to consider your public witness with your social media. I encourage you to realize while you may be immovable about a subject, with every right to be so, to whom much is given much is required that we might not become harmful to the body of Christ and a point of disunity, rather than focused purpose. Use maturity, developed wisdom, and reliable responsibility in your leadership."
- There are people unfortunately looking to mock the church of God. Let's not give them reason.

SIGNAGE

- And, if any of this type signage (below) could assist navigating your journey, feel free to use, as needed.

Stop the Spread of Germs

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



When in public, wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

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To reiterate, churches that have recognition as General Council affiliated assemblies are self-governing but, bylaws-Cooperative Assemblies of God entities and are, therefore, liable and legally responsible for their own actions. Again, churches not yet having met the General Council status guidelines and affiliated as KYAG Network Affiliated (District Council Affiliated) are Network supervised with Network liability and as such, follow in unity and accountability all Network or General Council guidelines. All churches are to have a written policy/plan for reopening. If you are a District Affiliated Church pastor, please create and communicate your written policy/plan to your presbyter to discuss matters prior to reopening. If you have any questions, please contact either a Network officer or your section presbyter. May God Richly Bless Us All as we navigate these waters together.

#StrongerTogether #KYAG

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. K. Miller'.