

Question 1: Are we in Phase 1 or Phase 2?

Answer: Congregations may now make the decision to move into Phase 2 at this time. The factors that will help guide the decision to move into Phase 2 are:

- Check public health indicators for your specific area. Guidelines say that the COVID-19 infection rate for your county must be either **flat or declining for two weeks** before moving into Phase 2. You can find this information on the [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) and more specifically on your specific county health department site.
- Congregation's ability to follow the guidelines issued as it relates to disinfecting, wearing of masks, etc.
- Setup of building if it allows physical distancing. We have been using the physical distancing guideline for our churches as the controlling piece of information for reopening.

At this time there is no indication as to when Phase 3 will occur. We estimate that this may take several months, but will communicate as more information comes available. Also, keep in mind there is a possibility of moving back to Phase 1 if public health orders require us to do so.

Q2: When congregations reopen, are they guided by the amount of space they have for physical distancing, their 50% occupancy rate, or a cap on the number (like 10)?

A: For worship gatherings, each congregation needs to make their decision on how many can safely gather in their specific space; with a **maximum** of 50% occupancy and taking into consideration physical distancing of at least 6 feet between family units. It is advisable for larger congregations to have a limit **lower than** 50% to start, and to work up to that level over a few weeks by observing how people react to the distancing requirements and wearing of masks.



Q3: Do our social distancing guidelines also control the admittance of small groups and outside groups such as AA, etc.?

A: Yes. Any group entering the building must agree to comply with the social distancing guidelines, wearing masks and sanitization rules. It is suggested to start with a limit of 10 people for these groups and work up to larger numbers (not exceeding 50% of occupancy) depending on size of the room. Each meeting room should display maximum occupancy and have only enough seating available for that number. In addition, it would be helpful to display a floor plan diagramming how to ensure the 6 foot distancing.

Q4: What liability does the church have if someone contracts the virus while attending a service or using the church for a meeting?

A: There is no special provision in Church Insurance policies regarding COVID-19 liability. It is recommended that a cautionary statement be published in the invitation to reopen that attendance at worship is subject to the risk of contracting the disease and that by attending you are voluntarily assuming that risk. Our chancellor has suggested this wording but it should not be used as a standalone statement:

“We ask that all present observe our guidelines and rules for health and safety during worship. We cannot and do not guarantee the absence of risk from your presence with us.”

Church Insurance Co. has provided this guidance: For liability, a covered occurrence is defined as an accident (aka unforeseeable) and we do not know if this type of loss (claim in terms of COVID-19) fits that definition. Additionally, we do not know how courts will see this type of suit since it has never been tested. In general, coverage opinions suggest coverage is unlikely but again, we cannot answer the question definitively without specific details of a loss. Of course, the best defense against lawsuits is to avoid negligence. In any event, we will review every claim on a case-by-case basis.

Q5: Is the liturgy of Spiritual Communion authorized until actual reception is allowed?

A: Bishop Breidenthal has indicated that this is acceptable. Some churches are using this traditional prayer from the Army Prayer Book:

In union, O Lord with the faithful at every altar of Thy Church, where the Holy Eucharist is now being celebrated, I desire to offer Thee praise and thanksgiving. I present to Thee my soul and body with the earnest wish that may always be united to Thee. And since I can not now receive Thee sacramentally, I beseech Thee to come spiritually into my heart. I unite myself to Thee, and embrace Thee with all the affections of my soul. Let nothing ever separate Thee from me. May I live and die in Thy love. Amen.

You also can find an expanded, modern liturgy in St. Augustine’s Prayer Book (Forward Movement, 2014) pp. 190-193.

