



Presbytery of the Northern Plains

5555 South Washington Street ~ Grand Forks, North Dakota 58201

(701) 772-0783 or (800) 243-3532 Fax (701) 775-7599

www.northernplainspresbytery.com

April 30, 2020

Churches, Sessions and Communities in Christ,

We the Leadership Pod of the Presbytery have been asked about a recommendation for the return of gathering in person guidelines, from the COVID-19 sheltering in place. We have a wide diversity of church sizes in our presbytery and also across state lines. So it is important to know that the churches in Minnesota have different criteria, than the ones in North Dakota or Montana. Churches in North Dakota were never any part of a Governors Executive Order to not assemble. Most chose to close because of the 10 member gathering rule and to love our neighbors by trying to protect everyone.

IT IS THE LEADERSHIP PODS VIEW THAT CHURCHES CONTINUE TO REMAIN CLOSED UNTIL AT LEAST THE PHASE 2 REOPENING.

Social Distancing of 6 foot will continue to be important.

No physical handshakes or physical passing of the peace.

Passing of collection plate is discouraged, place by the sanctuary entry door for members to drop pledges in.

The same will go for communion. No passing of common plates or serving holders. Have seen some churches go to paper cups with bread and juice already in them. These are prepared beforehand using proper hygiene and sanitary gloves.

Further in this letter are the requirements for continuing to protect church members in phase 2.

There are lots of church sites for helping us get through this as the greater community of Christians.

PC(USA) COVID 19 resource page.

<https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>

Wisconsin Council of Churches (comes from PC(USA) recommendation for resources

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>

Methodist Church Conference PDF **IS ATTACHED.**

Lutheran Synods of North Dakota is below

Blessings to one and all, stay safe and healthy

Paul Campbell

PaulHCampbell

Moderator of Leadership Pod of the Presbytery of Northern Plains.

From Lutheran Synod of North Dakota

On April 15, 2020, Governor Doug Burgum shared the *North Dakota Smart Restart Plan* for reopening our state. This plan takes into consideration recent directives issued by the Federal Government and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), as well as the real impact of COVID-19 on residents of our state, as monitored by the state health department. The *North Dakota Smart Restart* plan includes eight requirements that must be met prior to reopening. These include:

- Robust, widespread rapid testing capacity ☐
- Robust contact tracing and infrastructure ☐
- Targeted, effective quarantine ☐
- Protections for the state's most vulnerable populations
- Sufficient health care capacity, hospital/ICU beds ☐
- Ample PPE availability for the health care system and the public ☐
- New standard operating procedures for reopening
- Plans for dealing with a resurgence or additional waves of COVID-19. ☐

(More information on this plan can be found on the NDResponse.gov website.)

During his daily press conference on April 28th, Governor Burgum unveiled the *ND Smart Restart Protocols*, which are new standard operating procedures for businesses.

The guidelines below come from the several sites dealing with the COVID-19. Much of this was assembled by our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran Synods of North Dakota.

The ND Smart Restart Protocols are available on the ND Smart Restart website. A detailed PDF document that outlines the universal protocols that apply to ALL business, including churches, can be found [HERE](#). In summary, these universal standards include:

- Adhering to CDC and ND Department of Health guidelines
- Completing the workplace assessment available on the ND Smart Restart Website
- Limiting occupancy to ensure minimum 6-foot physical distancing
- Posting signage with guidance
- Encouraging cloth face coverings
- Providing contactless payment systems
- Providing adequate hand sanitizer, soap & water
- Regularly disinfecting frequently-touched surfaces
- Displaying policies and procedures for isolation
- Encouraging the use of the *Care 19 App* to improve contact tracing

With all this in mind, you may be asking, “When will we resume in-person worship?”

First, it is important to state that just because we can meet together in-person for worship, does not mean that we must. We encourage congregational leadership to take the time necessary to carefully assess their local context and to intentionally create a plan. The decision to return to in-person group worship should be made by the pastor and council together, in thoughtful collaboration, paying careful attention to the following:

- The safety of the congregation and the wider community
- Recommendations from local health officials
- Consultation with the congregation's insurance carrier
- ND Smart Restart Protocols
- Federal guidelines for a three-phased re-opening

Large gatherings are the most dangerous venue for a community-wide viral outbreak. No congregation wants to engage in actions that could cause a resurgence of Covid-19. If just one life is lost—whether in the congregation or wider community—it is not worth it.

Our contexts and communities vary with respect to infection rates, therefore in-person worship will likely resume at different times in different places. Resuming in-person worship will need to happen in phases. We offer these recommendations to help inform your decisions.

What are the three phases, and how do they guide life together in congregations?

The Federal document **Guidelines for Opening up America Again** explains the phased reopening of businesses. Before proceeding to these phases, the document says the following gating criteria should be met, in order to mitigate against resurgence and protect the most vulnerable.

- 14-days of declining symptoms
- 14-days of declining cases
- Hospitals able to treat all patients without crisis care
- Robust testing (including emerging antibody-testing) in place for at-risk healthcare workers

When all the above-mentioned criteria are true for your region, then elected officials and health experts will begin with phase one. **In all phases**, good hygiene practices like washing hands and wearing masks in public are strongly recommended. People who feel sick should stay at home, not go to work or to school. Social distancing will be important for the foreseeable future. Here are the guidelines for each phase which will influence life in our congregations.

Phase 1 – For states and regions with 14 days of declining cases

- Schools, daycare, and organized youth activities stay closed.
- Large venues like **churches**, movie theaters, ball parks and arenas may reopen, but observing *strict* social distancing protocols.
- Return to work in phases. Close common areas at work where people gather. Encourage telecommuting.
- Avoid non-essential travel.
- Hospitals and senior centers remain closed to visitors.

Phase 1 in your Congregation: Once your county or municipality has had 14 days of declining cases, you may resume in-person worship, weddings and funerals while practicing extreme hygiene and *strict* social distancing protocols (e.g. sitting every-other pew, six feet apart, no handshakes, no passing of the peace, etc.). The fellowship hall/gathering space should remain closed. Continue to strongly discourage vulnerable individuals from attending. No visits to hospitals or senior care facilities. No schools or youth activities. Encourage church staff to work from home as much as possible. Fellowship activities are still suspended. Stay in phone contact with seniors and homebound members of your congregation and community.

Phase 2 – For states and regions with no evidence of a rebound and who satisfy the gating criteria for a second time

- All vulnerable populations continue to shelter in place.
- People understand that, if they return to work, they could be putting at risk vulnerable residents in their households.
- All people should continue to maximize physical distance in public.
- Non-essential travel may resume.
- Employers should continue to encourage telecommuting and keep common areas closed.
- Schools, daycare, camps and organized youth activities may resume.
- Visits to senior care facilities and hospitals remain prohibited.
- Large venues (sit-down dining, movie theaters, and **churches**) can operate with *moderate* social distancing protocols.

Phase 2 in your Congregation: Once your county/municipality has had 28 days of declining cases without resurgence, you may resume in-person worship, weddings and funerals with *moderate* social distancing protocols. Strongly discourage vulnerable individuals from attending. No visits to hospitals or senior care facilities. Schools, camps and organized youth activities may resume with social distancing. Continue to encourage church staff to work from home when possible. Fellowship hour and activities may resume with maximum social distancing and proper food safety protocols. Stay in phone contact with seniors and homebound members of your congregation and community.

Phase 3 – For states and regions with no evidence of a rebound and who satisfy the gating criteria for a third time

- Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions but should observe physical distancing.
- High risk individuals should minimize time in crowded environments.
- Worksites may now resume without restrictions.
- Visits to senior care facilities and hospitals may resume, remaining diligent with hygiene.
- Large venues (sit-down dining, movie theaters, and **churches**) can operate with *limited* social distancing protocols.

Phase 3 in your Congregation: Once your county/municipality has had 42 days of declining cases without resurgence, you may resume in-person worship, weddings and funerals with *limited* social distancing protocols. Strongly discourage vulnerable individuals from attending. Visits to hospitals and senior care facilities may resume with great care. Schools, daycare, or youth activities may resume with limited social distancing. Church staff may work without restrictions. Fellowship may resume with limited social distancing. Resume homebound communion.