

Reopening Questions, Considerations, and Strategies

This is an open document to read and use within your churches. If you have suggestions, corrections or additions to be made to this document or helpful resources to add and you do not have commenting privileges, please [feel free to send them to me](#).

Information [curated from a number of sources](#) by Tom Elenbaas, Harbor Churches.

Table of Contents

Values	4
Values & Overarching Principles	4
Frameworks	6
5 Shifts	6
7 Strategies to Reopen the Church	6
Relaunch Phases	7
Criteria for Re-Opening	8
Initial Federal Government Phases, Gates, and Recommendations	8
Guidelines for All Phases for Individuals	8
Guidelines for All Phases for Congregations	8
Protecting Vulnerable Individuals	8
NEW (May 2020) CDC Federal Government Phases, Gates, and Recommendations	9
Click here to see full 69 page document	9
Phased Plan and Indicators for Reopening America The plan for reopening America outlines a three-phased approach for reducing community mitigation measures while protecting vulnerable populations. The phased approach can be implemented statewide or community-by-community at governors’ discretion. The guidelines propose the use of six “gating” indicators to assess when to move through from one mitigation phase to another.	9
Gating Criteria and Phase-specific Thresholds	9
Gating Criteria	9
Threshold for entering Phase 1	9
Threshold for entering Phase 2	9
Threshold for entering Phase 3	9
Decisions to move between phases should also consider the public health capacity of the jurisdiction based on the criteria listed below. Other epidemiologic data sources available locally can be used to corroborate trends seen in core epidemiologic gating criteria. Special consideration should be given to infections identified in populations and settings such as healthcare personnel, patients in healthcare facilities (e.g., nursing homes, dialysis centers, long-term care facilities), and residents of congregate living settings (e.g., prisons, youth homes, shelters), underserved populations, and people of racial and ethnic minority groups (e.g., African Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives) at higher risk of disease. Incidence and trajectory (increasing versus decreasing) of COVID-19 illnesses in the surrounding region should also be considered.	10
While some communities will progress sequentially through the reopening phases, there is the possibility of recrudescence in some areas. Given the potential for a rebound in the number of cases or level of community transmission, a low threshold for reinstating more	

stringent mitigation standards will be essential. The decision to reinstate community mitigation strategies will undoubtedly be very difficult and will require careful thought to define an evidence-based monitoring strategy and specific guidance for these decisions.	11
State of Michigan Restrictions and Religious Exemptions	12
Federal Government Phases for Re-Opening	15
Michigan State Start Plan - a plan to re-engage Michigan's Economy	18
On May 7, the State of Michigan released this reopening plan and phases. Unfortunately there is little clarity on large gatherings or strict, moderate and limited social distancing guidelines.	18
Readiness for Re-Gathering	20
Worship Best Practices	20
Guest Services Best Practices	21
Facilities Best Practice	21
Volunteer Best Practices	21
Kids Ministry Best Practices	22
Space Occupancy Calculations:	22
Key things to Communicate	23
Additional Decisions Regarding Gatherings	23
Additional Questions and Considerations	23
Additional Questions	23
Potential Pre-Re-Opening Congregational Survey	24
House Church Option	24
Additional Gathering Ideas	25
Point of Care Protocols	25
Additional Random Notes:	25
4 Pillars of Relaunch - Critical Questions	27
Relaunching CULTURE	27
Relaunching LEADERSHIP	27
Relaunching MINISTRY	28
Relaunching FACILITIES	29
Articles and Resources	30

Values

Values & Overarching Principles

“Any social system - a family, workplace, or even a whole society - improves when people function less and less in reactive ways and more and more on the basis of values and beliefs sustained by clear goals.” -Peter Steinke, *Uproar*

Questions: What are the Values that will guide our decision-making? These are some ideas for suggested values.

- We will follow the data and guidelines of local, state and federal government and health officials, keeping public health as a high priority.
- We believe that recovering and evaluating our missiology will reshape our practical ecclesiology.
- We will continue to be evangelistically minded during these shifting times, seeking creative ways to empower our congregations to be good news and share the gospel.
- We will prioritize caring for the most vulnerable among us.
- We value being together and worshipping together; we value relationships as a core value of the church.
- We will ask the following key questions as we make decisions:
 - What does **LOVE** require of us?
 - What would **WISDOM** say?
 - What does it mean right now to be **GOOD NEWS** to our community?
 - What does it mean to create **COMMUNITIES** of **BELONGING** right now?
- We will encourage people to make wise personal decisions about their comfort and safety, will not create pressure on individuals to gather, and will make accommodations and adjustments as needed. We seek to honor differing concerns and desires with respect to safety, reopening, etc and approach our Christian brothers and sisters with humility and grace when we differ.
- We will seek to find where the Spirit is leading on the other side of disruption, and how God may be opening up new opportunities to reach those who are far from God.
- We value our church culture; we will seek to make decisions that protect the culture we desire and believe God has called us; we also believe that God sometimes disrupts our normal to shift us from our current culture, and so we will listen for that challenge.
- We will make differentiated decisions based on the above values rather than in response to social or other pressures.

- We will embrace flexibility while creating stability through predictable patterns where possible.
- We will create clear boundaries and guidelines, and then empower teams to make decisions about best practices based on those boundaries and guidelines.

A reopening plan should be built to create a safe environment for people who want to and are ready to return. However, it should also be based upon and take into consideration providing a safe and respectful environment that addresses the concerns of the most vulnerable, nervous congregants and guests, the elderly and young parents.

Phased Reopening with Triggers and Gates: Consider a phased reopening with contingency plans for moving forwards and backwards in the case of a resurgence with as much agility as possible, while still providing stability and continuity. It may be wise to determine and communicate predetermined Gates and Triggers for reopening to mitigate social and cultural pressure and to avoid decisions made emotionally. Speed, pressure, and anxiety can drive emotional reactivity that inhibits deliberate, thoughtful, and prayerful decision-making. One of the best approaches we leaders can take during these times is to breath, pause, listen, pray, think, deliberate, and then act.

Frameworks

5 Shifts¹

- Shift #1 - EVALUATION: From Criticizing to Evaluating
 - Evaluation Question: How do we thrive during this time?
- Shift #2 - DIGITALIZATION: From Informing to Digitizing
 - Digitalization Question: How can we move all spiritual formation online?
- Shift #3 - MOBILIZATION: From Collecting to Mobilizing
 - Mobilization Question: How do we get every person on mission now?
- Shift #4 - COLLABORATION: From Competing to Collaborating
 - Collaboration Question: How do we work together with other churches?
- Shift #5 - MULTIPLICATION: From Adding to Multiplying
 - Multiplication Question: How do we reproduce new expressions of the church?

7 Strategies to Reopen the Church²

1. Maximize, focus, and streamline the use of online platforms
2. Stay one month ahead and prepare accordingly, including contingency planning.
3. Adjust future ministry models to accommodate the decisions of the government by slowly phasing gatherings for the well-being of our community.
4. Consider where our communities stand emotionally to guide them in the most appropriate way.
5. Over-communicate the precautions that will be taken at our churches.
6. Create contingency plans that minimize large gatherings.
7. Incorporate multiple services throughout the week to decrease the number of people attending at a time.

¹ [5 Shifts for Thriving in the New Normal](#) by Dave Ferguson

² Revised from [Reopening the Church: A Discussion on Leading After COVID-19](#) by William Vanderbloemen

Relaunch Phases³

PHASE ONE	
RETHINK ministry continuity and stability	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from reactive to proactive crisis management • Define and determine what is “mission critical” • Reduce or eliminate any nonessential activities and events • Review and perhaps revise staff responsibilities to deal with new realities and crisis points (short-term) • Explore “best practices” being implemented by other churches 	
PHASE TWO	
RECOVER by reviewing, regrouping, redefining, and refocusing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine strategy for every aspect of weekend service(s) • Develop flexible plans to anticipate changing factors related to finances, operations, staffing, etc. • Adjust budget projections and spending for every line item through end of the fiscal year • Leverage new learnings for ongoing use, especially related to technology • Establish a centralized ministry team (task force) to work collectively on relaunch efforts • Refocus goals and redefine metrics 	
PHASE THREE	
RETOOL for the “new normal”	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act upon detailed assessment of congregational needs/ care • Leverage new technology tools for greater impact: Telecare, teleconferencing, virtual learning, etc. • Determine staffing/ volunteer needs for long-term recovery • Rethink ministry priorities and adjust spending plans to deal with most critical areas of need • Implement all necessary health and social awareness measures • Increase and strengthen congregational empowerment strategies 	

³ See [Re-Entry and Reconnect](#)” by John Spurling

Criteria for Re-Opening

Initial Federal Government Phases, Gates, and Recommendations

SYMPTOMS	CASES	HOSPITALS
Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses (ILI) reported within a 14-day period AND a downward trajectory of covid-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period	Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period OR a downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)	Treat all patients without crisis care AND a robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing

*These gating criteria can be regionalized within a state. Michigan to date has not released its own gates or phases. To move to a new phase, an additional 14 days must be achieved without relapse.

Guidelines for All Phases for Individuals

1. Continue to practice good hygiene.
2. People who feel sick should stay home.

Guidelines for All Phases for Congregations

1. Implement appropriate policies based on federal, state, and local regulations and guidelines.
2. Monitor staff, volunteers, and participants for indicative symptoms, and do not allow symptomatic people to be present working or in activities of the congregation. Staff and volunteers should be cleared, preferably by a medical provider, before returning.
3. Implement policies and procedures for staff contact tracing once staff is tested for COVID-19.

Protecting Vulnerable Individuals

We are committed to special care for the following:

1. Elderly individuals
2. Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those with compromised immune systems

NEW (May 2020) CDC Federal Government Phases, Gates, and Recommendations

[Click here to see full 69 page document](#)

UPDATED (May 23) Deciding to Open: [CDC Interim Guidance for Faith Communities](#)

Phased Plan and Indicators for Reopening America The plan for reopening America outlines a three-phased approach for reducing community mitigation measures while protecting vulnerable populations. The phased approach can be implemented statewide or community-by-community at governors’ discretion. The guidelines propose the use of six “gating” indicators to assess when to move through from one mitigation phase to another.

Gating Criteria and Phase-specific Thresholds

Gating Criteria	Threshold for entering Phase 1	Threshold for entering Phase 2	Threshold for entering Phase 3
Decreases in newly identified COVID-19 cases	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of documented cases over a 14-day period	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of documented cases for at least 14 days after entering Phase 1	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of documented cases for at least 14 days after entering Phase 2
Decreases in emergency department (ED) and/or outpatient visits for COVIDlike illness (CLI)	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of CLI syndromic cases reported over a 14-day period	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of CLI syndromic cases reported for at least 14 days after entering Phase 1	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of CLI syndromic cases reported for at least an additional 14 days after entering Phase 2
Decreases in ED and/or outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI)	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of ILI reported over a 14-day period	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of ILI reported for at least 14 days after entering Phase 1	Downward trajectory (or near-zero incidence) of ILI reported for at least an additional 14 days after entering Phase 2
Decreases in percentage of	Downward trajectory (or near-zero percent	Downward trajectory (or near-zero percent	Downward trajectory (or near-zero percent

SARS-CoV-2 tests positive	positive) of positive tests as a percentage of total tests over a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)	positive) of positive tests as a percentage of total tests for 14 days after entering Phase 1 (flat or increasing volume of tests)	positive) of positive tests as a percentage of total tests for at least 14 days after entering Phase 2 (flat or increasing volume of tests)
Treat all patients without crisis care	Jurisdiction inpatient & ICU beds <80% full Staff shortage in last week = no PPE supplies adequate for >4 days	Jurisdiction inpatient & ICU beds <75% full Staff shortage in last week = no PPE supplies adequate for >4 days	Jurisdiction inpatient & ICU beds <70% full Staff shortage in last week = no PPE supplies adequate for >15 days
Robust testing program	Test availability such that percentage of positive tests is <20% for 14 days Median time from test order to result is <4 days	Test availability such that percentage of positive tests is <15% for 14 days Median time from test order to result is <3 days	Test availability such that the percentage of positive tests is <10% for 14 days Median time from test order to result is <2 days

Decisions to move between phases should also consider the public health capacity of the jurisdiction based on the criteria listed below. Other epidemiologic data sources available locally can be used to corroborate trends seen in core epidemiologic gating criteria. Special consideration should be given to infections identified in populations and settings such as healthcare personnel, patients in healthcare facilities (e.g., nursing homes, dialysis centers, long-term care facilities), and residents of congregate living settings (e.g., prisons, youth homes, shelters), underserved populations, and people of racial and ethnic minority groups (e.g., African Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives) at higher risk of disease. Incidence and trajectory (increasing versus decreasing) of COVID-19 illnesses in the surrounding region should also be considered.

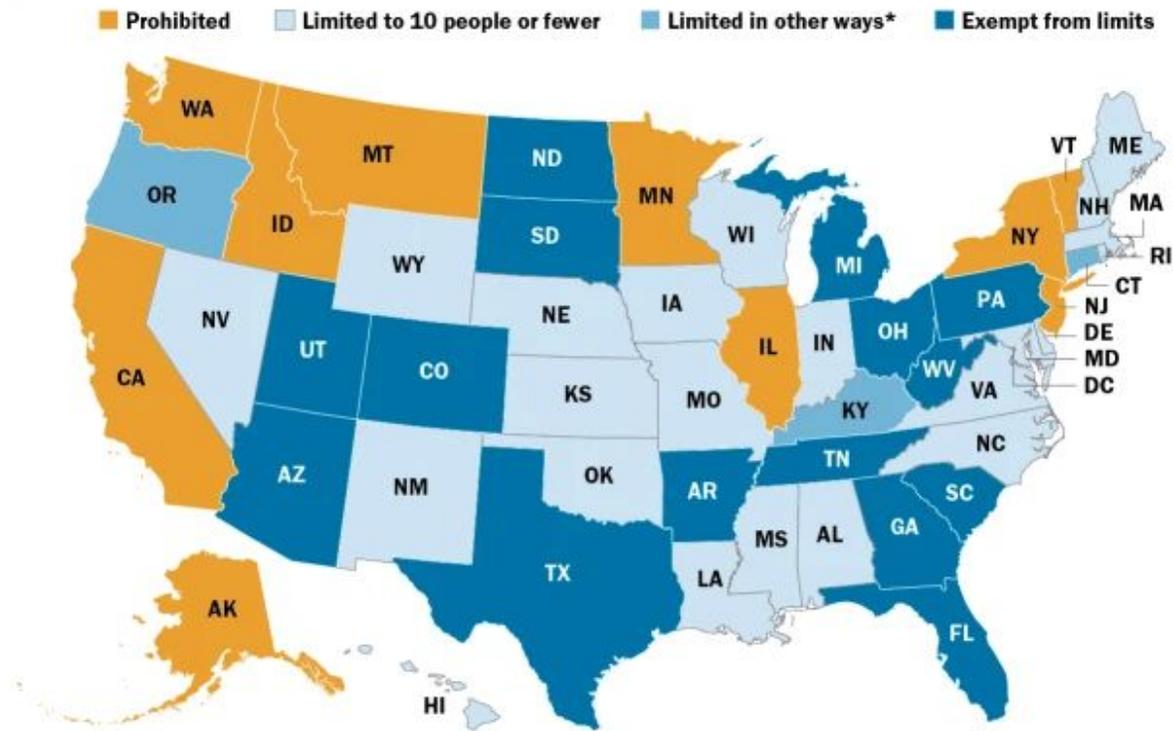
Category	Considerations for Assessing Capacity for Case Identification, Follow Up, and Containment
SARS-CoV-2 testing in jurisdiction	Testing is available as indicated for

	clinical, public health, and infection prevention needs.
Identification of new COVID-19 cases	All new COVID-19 cases in the jurisdiction can be rapidly identified through active surveillance, including proactive monitoring for asymptomatic cases through surveillance monitoring.
Interviewing new COVID-19 cases	Initial interviews can be conducted for nearly all new COVID-19 cases within one day of health department notification.
Contact tracing	Follow up (isolation, self-monitoring, and rapid testing of selected contacts) can be initiated for nearly all identified contacts of newly identified cases.
Incidence relative to local public health resources	Public health capacity is sufficient to fully perform contact tracing and investigate outbreaks based on local incidence and resources available.

While some communities will progress sequentially through the reopening phases, there is the possibility of recrudescence in some areas. Given the potential for a rebound in the number of cases or level of community transmission, a low threshold for reinstating more stringent mitigation standards will be essential. The decision to reinstate community mitigation strategies will undoubtedly be very difficult and will require careful thought to define an evidence-based monitoring strategy and specific guidance for these decisions.

Most states have religious exemptions to COVID-19 social distancing rules

States where religious gatherings are ...



*Includes states that allow more than 10 people per religious gathering but still limit the number of people allowed to attend. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of state regulations.

Note: This graphic reflects executive orders in effect on April 24. Montana allowed places of worship to resume services on April 26.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Contrary to common knowledge and many incorrect rumors, churches have not been unable to meet under Michigan Shelter-At-Home restrictions. Even in the Executive Orders prohibiting gathering of groups of 250+, then 50+, and then 10+, churches are and were still allowed to gather. In the early Executive Orders, the vague language in the Executive Order may have caused confusion, but did not take away the right of churches to gather: *“This prohibition does not abridge protections guaranteed by the state or federal constitution under these emergency circumstances.”*⁴ Beginning on March 24 with Executive Order 2020-21, the wording was made more specific: *“Consistent with prior guidance, a place of religious worship, when used for religious worship, is not subject to penalty under section 14.”*⁵ This was detailed even further in following orders:⁶

⁴ Executive Orders [2020-5 S1](#) and [2020-11 S1d](#)

⁵ [Executive Order 2020-21 S10](#)

⁶ Cf. Executive Orders [2020-42 S13](#), [2020-59 S16](#), [2020-70 S16](#), and [2020-77 S16](#)

Nothing in this order should be taken to supersede another executive order or directive that is in effect, except to the extent this order imposes more stringent limitations on in-person work, activities, and interactions. Consistent with prior guidance, neither a place of religious worship nor its owner is subject to penalty under section 20 of this order for allowing religious worship at such place. No individual is subject to penalty under section 20 of this order for violating section 15(a) of this order.⁷

What does this mean?

First, It is important to note to our congregations that, contrary to many social media posts, rumors, and spreading fear about the loss of 1st Amendment Rights, churches are not and have not been prohibited from gathering or worshipping in Michigan, even though that has been the case in other states. Churches, their pastors, and employees have not - according to the Executive Orders, been in danger of arrest for gathering,

Second, this means that instead, though churches are able to gather we have been encouraged to follow state and federal guidelines with respect to gatherings and seek wisdom that prioritizes public safety and health. There is much debate about the guidance for large venues on strict, moderate, and limited social distancing from the federal re-opening protocols and these have not been defined clearly for Michigan. This means that congregational leaders must use wisdom and make decisions that will affect their congregations and communities. This is why [determining your values as a church](#), understanding how you make decisions, and who has the authority to make those decisions will be key to explaining those decisions. Governor Whitmer has prohibited large gatherings while continuing to allow churches the exceptions normally guaranteed under the State and Federal Constitutions.

The most recent Executive Order 2020-77⁸ maintains the following restrictions:

Subject to the exceptions in section 7 of this order, all individuals currently living within the State of Michigan are ordered to stay at home or at their place of residence. Subject to the same exceptions, all public and private gatherings of any number of people occurring among persons not part of a single household are prohibited.

All individuals who leave their home or place of residence must adhere to social distancing measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC"), including remaining at least six feet from people from outside the individual's household to the extent feasible under the circumstances.

Though churches are exempt for *religious* reasons, these orders, the faith communities relationship to government, and our public witness should be taken seriously when the church considers reopening. Specifically, there are messages being sent to our congregations and communities when we choose either to move against government health recommendations or to comply with them. These messages can and will be construed both positively and negatively, impact the church's witness in different ways, and indicate our values and priorities. Churches

⁷ [Executive Order 2020-59 S16](#)

⁸ [Executive Order 2020-77 S1&2](#)

will and already are disagreeing on these; the key question will be whether to adhere to recommendations or not.

Federal Government Phases for Re-Opening

The bulk of the language and protocol here is from the [Federal Proposed Phased Approach](#), with moderate changes with an effort to make it applicable to churches. These phases should be determined also based upon the recommendations of the Governor before opening the church activities.

“As of this writing there is no definition around “strict,” “moderate,” or “limited” protocols. We’re under the assumption that at some point state governments will define their own gating criteria along with their protocols.” [CT Magazine, April 22, 2020](#)

	Individuals	Congregations
<p>PHASE 1 - For States and Regions that satisfy the gating criteria (14 day decrease in symptoms / cases)</p>	<p>All vulnerable individuals should shelter in place.</p> <p>Precautions should be taken to protect vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>When in public, maximize physical distance from others.</p> <p>Social settings of more than 10 people should be avoided.</p> <p>Minimize non-essential travel and adhere to CDC guidelines following travel.</p>	<p>Continue to encourage telework where possible and feasible.</p> <p>Staff should return to work in phases.</p> <p>Close common areas where people might naturally gather or enforce strict physical distancing protocols.</p> <p>Make special accommodations for staff and members who are vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>Youth group, VBS, preschool, and Kids Ministry type activities should remain closed.</p> <p>Visitation to senior living facilities and hospitals should be avoided.</p> <p>Large venues can operate under <u>strict physical distancing protocols</u>.</p> <p>Cafes and food service should remain closed.</p>
<p>PHASE 2 - for states and regions with no evidence</p>	<p>All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place.</p> <p>Precautions should be taken to protect vulnerable individuals.</p>	<p>Continue to encourage telework where possible and feasible.</p> <p>Staff should return to work in phases.</p>

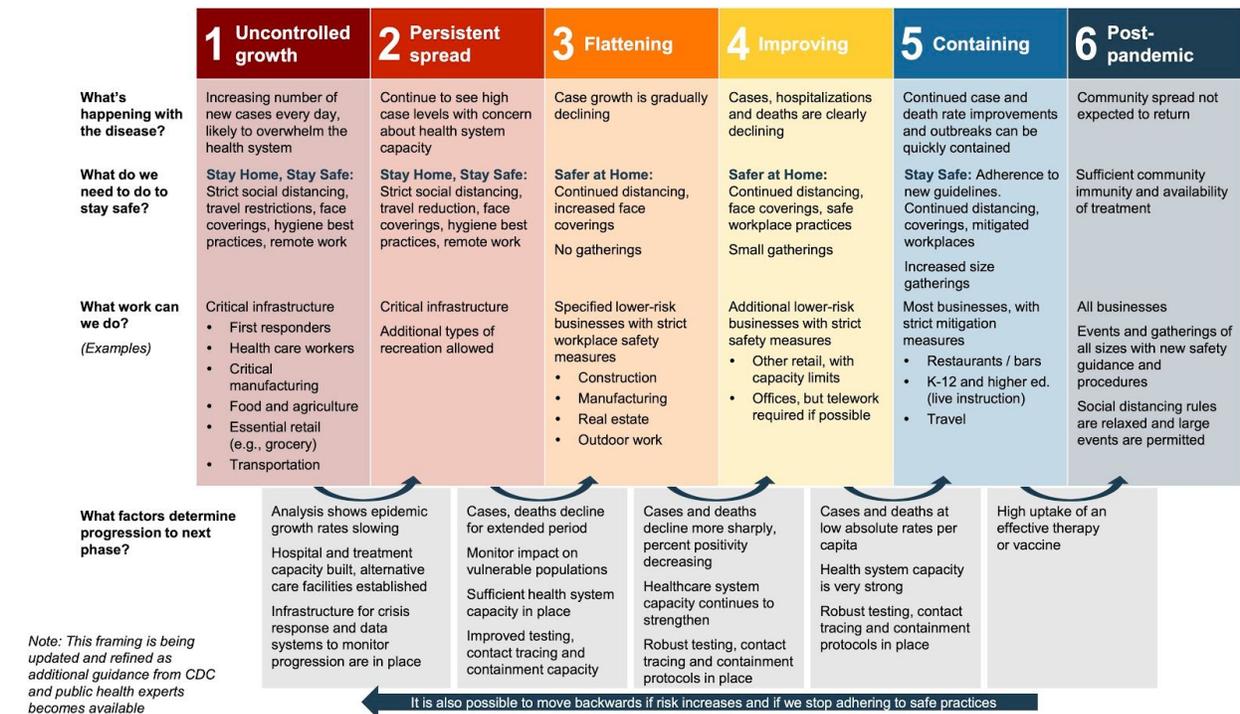
<p>of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a second time (28 day decrease in symptoms / cases)</p>	<p>When in public, individuals should maximize physical distance from others.</p> <p>Settings of more than 50 people should be avoided.</p> <p>Non-essential travel can resume.</p>	<p>Close common areas where people might naturally gather or enforce moderate physical distancing protocols.</p> <p>Make special accommodations for staff and members who are vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>Smaller gatherings of ministries with careful physical distancing protocols may resume.</p> <p>Visitation to senior living facilities and hospitals should be avoided.</p> <p>Congregations may operate under <u>moderate physical distancing protocols</u> in groups of less than 50.</p> <p>Cafes and food service may operate with diminished standing-room occupancy.</p>
<p>PHASE 3 - For States and Regions with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a third time (42 day decrease in symptoms / cases)</p>	<p>Vulnerable individuals can resume congregational interactions, but should practice physical distancing, minimizing exposure to congregational settings where distancing may not be practical, unless precautionary measures are observed.</p> <p>Low-risk individuals should consider minimizing time spent in crowded environments.</p>	<p>Resume unrestricted staffing and meetings at church sites.</p> <p>Visits to senior living facilities and hospitals can resume.</p> <p>Student Ministry, Kids Ministry and ministries over 50 can reopen.</p> <p>Congregations can operate under <u>limited physical distancing protocols</u>.</p> <p>Children’s ministry can resume.</p> <p>Cafes and food service may operate with increased standing-room occupancy.</p>

Sample STAFF, MINISTRY, AND GROUP GATHERINGS Based on FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

	PHASE 1 HomeGatherings	PHASE 2 SmallGatherings	PHASE 3 Mid-sizedGatherings	PHASE 4 NormalGatherings
GUIDELINES	<10	<50	>50	250+
Staff	Work from home except essential workers No in-person meetings unless absolutely necessary	Strongly recommend work from home Some small Meetings Staff meetings online	Work in the office In person meetings	Same 50-250
Ministries	Few if any in-person meetings; exceptions include AA, essential services, etc.	Ministries meet per guidelines	Ministries meet per guidelines	Ministries meet per guidelines
Weekend Gatherings	Church at Home; ministry resourcing; virtual groups	Church at Home; House Churches; ministry resourcing; virtual groups	Public worship with limited size; Online services (live-stream and pre-recorded) for church at home; House Churches; Online Interactive Campus	Public worship gatherings with modifications; Online services (live-stream and pre-recorded); House Churches; Online interactive Church

Michigan Safe Start Plan - a plan to re-engage Michigan's Economy

On May 7, the State of Michigan released [this reopening plan](#) and phases. Unfortunately there is little clarity on large gatherings or strict, moderate and limited social distancing guidelines. **NEW** On May 26, [the State released daily updated data](#) that is helpful to understand how these phases are determined based on **High**, **Medium-High**, **Medium** and **Low** risk of community spread. These correspond to phases 2, 3, 4, and 5 below in the MI Safe Start Plan. The data examined are Epidemic Spread (Tests given, New Cases, Deaths) and Public Health Capacity. These also correspond to some of the data suggested in the [CDC Gating Criteria](#).



Michigan is currently in Phase 3 of this six phase plan: *Flattening: Epidemic is no longer increasing and health system capacity is sufficient for current needs. Specified lower-risk businesses can reopen given adherence to strict safety measures.* The next phase would be

Phase 4: *Improving: Epidemic clearly decreasing and health system capacity is strong with robust testing and contact tracing. Additional businesses can reopen given adherence to strict safety measures.*

At this time, the recommendation for Phase 4 is still “*Gatherings: Limited to small groups with social distancing*” (p. 11) and it is not until Phase 5 that we see “Increased but still limited-sized groups with social distancing.” (p. 12) However, a few things to note that may affect decision-making:

1. Currently no definitions are given to “small gatherings” or “increased size gatherings.” One might wonder if, based on the staging into Shelter-in-Place, small gatherings refer to those less than 50⁹ and increased, less than 250.¹⁰
2. K-12 live instruction opens in Phase 5.

From this plan, because it is not explicit, it appears that most churches would be discouraged from gathering until Phase 5, and even then with social distancing and coverings encouraged. [As was stated earlier](#), churches are exempt from orders and legal ramifications. This section is merely looking at the recommended guidelines as they would apply to church-size and type gatherings.

The most recent order, [Executive Order 2020-77](#), does not speak specifically to large assemblages and venues. We understand these to still be under restriction. The [MI Safe Start Plan](#) does indicate the following, which may be instructive for churches seeking to stay in step with Government recommendations on gatherings:

We are also establishing working groups to advise the state on how we can safely re-engage child care and summer camps, as well as businesses such as restaurants and bars, travel and tourism, and entertainment venues, so that when it is safe, there are best practices established for how to partially open in a low-risk manner. (p. 5)

⁹ [Executive Order 2020-5 S1](#)

¹⁰ [Executive Order 2020-11 S1](#)

Readiness for Re-Gathering

The following adjustments should be made during Phase 2 for a Phase 3 and Phase 4 public gatherings.

1. COVID-19 task force works on a coordinated effort for reopening the church, centralizing data, decisions, and information.
2. Develop a plan for each key ministry area based on the phases with key changes, innovations, and communications.
3. Adopt a **stagility** mindset - one that balances stability and agility.
4. Use phases and gates rather than setting a date which could lead to disappointing your congregation.

In addition to the items below, for more examples of detailed strategies, see the [resources in this folder](#).

Worship Best Practices	
Create a Contactless Experience	Remove Bibles, hymnals, offering baskets, etc
Worship Teams	Model Social Distancing on stage Avoid shared microphones
Greeting Time	No physical touch
Communion	Pre-packaged dispenser
Physical Distancing	Use every other row of seating; ask families to sit with 6' between them Consider multiple venues in the facility
Offering	Text to give; online; giving boxes; mail
Evaluate length of congregational singing	Singing has been shown to increase airborne concerns beyond 6'
Dismissal	Consider a structured dismissal to maintain order and distance

Guest Services Best Practices

Food, coffee	None until further notice; consider new safety precautions when serving food and coffee begins again
Hand-outs; bulletins; worship folders	Online
Greeting time	None... or modified for no touch?
Consider plexiglass at Guest Services	
Guest cards	Text; online guest book
Greeting	At doors; doors open; no contact; masks?
Provide single use materials for kids in worship	
Other	Masks available? Sanitizer available

Facilities Best Practice

Cleaning	Between each gathering (increase time between gatherings); signs indicating what and when cleaned
Evaluate spaces	Close off unused sections of the church; remove lobby seating areas
Seating	Remove Bibles, pens, contact cards
Bathroom	Convert to touchproof if possible
Events	Sizes, frequencies, staffing, etc.
Air flow	Consider running HVAC continuously or opening doors and windows if possible

Volunteer Best Practices

Re-evaluate volunteers needs	Build a new plan with new volunteer numbers required for each stage
Confirm with volunteers	Many will step down from roles during this time
Recruit new volunteers	This is an opportunity to engage the unengaged

Kids Ministry Best Practices	
To be developed by Kids' Team	
Should a phase for kids wait until schools reopen and use their protocols as guides?	
Should nursery be offered prior to the full opening of Kids Ministry?	Require a prior RSVP; provide 1:1 nursery care

Space Occupancy Calculations:

Large stores in Michigan in E.O. 2020-77 are required to keep occupancy of stores with below 50,000 sq/ft below 25% and stores greater than 50,000 sq/ft at 1 person per 1000 sq/ft until May 28. This may be an indicator to help determine capacity within larger venues such as churches.

Below are some suggested ways to determine strict, moderate, and limited social distancing without guidance from the federal and state protocols.

- Strict Social Distancing Suggestions
 - 6' of separation equals 36 sqft.
 - New Occupance: Sqft of space - _____/36 = ____ individuals new occupancy
- Moderate Social Distancing Suggestions
 - 4' of separation equals 16 sqft.
 - Sqft of space/16
 - _____/16 = ____ individuals new occupancy
- Limited Social Distancing Suggestions
 - 3' of separation equals 9 sqft.
 - Sqft of space/ 9
 - _____/9 = ____ individuals is the new occupancy
- Normal Occupancy (Some other factors can be considered, Local Building department or Fire Department should have room occupancy rates for your facility)
 - 7 sqft is code requirement to calculate normal occupancy

- Sqft of space/7
- _____/7 = ____ individuals new occupancy

**Note, new occupancy numbers will likely include kids in the Worship Space.

Key things to Communicate

- It is your decision when you are ready to be in-person; we are providing options.
- Provide clear information about the options.
- Share heightened cleaning measures.
- It's okay to wear masks.
- Clarify different ministry decisions (worship gathering, kids, students, groups, etc.)
- We are paying attention to ways to reduce contact and maintain good hygiene

Additional Decisions Regarding Gatherings

- Consider an early service for the elderly and the vulnerable
- What adjustments need to be made to gathering times? (Number, length, days...)
 - Remember that worship center capacity now includes kids while Kids Ministry is closed.
- How do we create trust with parents for Kids ministry?
 - Consider creating a parent advisory team to determine questions, concerns, and make recommendations to Kids Ministry Staff team for decision-making.
- Limiting
 - Do we need some sort of system for who attends when? (A-L, M-Z; reservations)
 - Consider counting at the doors and protocols for closing doors when reaching capacity.
 - Consider an overflow venue if you have the capacity
- Prioritize space based on ministry priority
- Do we require masks on Sunday morning? Do any staff/ volunteers use masks/ gloves? Do we distribute masks if available? Do we turn away those without masks?
- Will we have any "point-of-care" protocols in place that will require taking temperature readings or other symptomatic measures before people enter the building?
- Can we obtain the physical resources (cleaning supplies) and people resources for additional cleaning?

Additional Questions and Considerations

Additional Questions

- If our decisions differ from other local churches, what are our shared talking points?
 - How will we honor other churches even in our disagreements?

- For instance: “As we seek to be good news to our community, we believe good news right now for our church means...”
- Will people fight to care for the poor and the vulnerable? Or will they fight to keep golf, boating, and meeting on Sundays?
- How can we avoid being reactionary? How can we be proactive and innovative? How can we be transparent and forthcoming in our decision-making and rationale?

Potential Pre-Re-Opening Congregational Survey

Should we do a survey of our people to find out under what conditions they will return and how we can best serve them? Here are some potential survey questions:¹¹

- [Here are examples that can be used from Auxano and Lifeway.](#)
- Under what conditions would you feel comfortable returning to the church building for worship gatherings?
- Would you be willing to wear a mask to a worship gathering?
- Under what conditions would you feel comfortable putting your kids in kids ministry?
- If you volunteer, are you planning to volunteer in the same spot when we reopen? If not, would you be willing to serve in another way?
- In the last 6 weeks, how many times have you watched services online? What worship time would you most likely attend online if worship was available by live-stream?
- How many times a month do you typically attend church?
- Have you ever given online to our church?
- Would you be comfortable participating in Communion if done so in a way that observes safety precautions?
- Would you consider attending a House Church with 10-20 people more quickly than returning to public worship gatherings?

House Church Option

Key questions and attention items

- What are the core values of a House Church?
- What are the rhythms of a House Church? (Weekly, monthly, daily)
- What are the core practices of a House Church? (food, music, communion, engagement with scripture, sermon, discussion, kids, prayer, generosity)
- How can House Churches best live into Up, Out, and In rhythms?
- How will we ensure our congregations are invited into a group?
- How can these be permeable and outsider focused?
- What ongoing training and coaching can hosts expect to receive?
- What resources will our church provide to House Churches?
- How will we keep House Churches connected to our larger congregations?

¹¹ [10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CONGREGATION BEFORE YOU REOPEN](#) by Greg Atkinson April 28, 2020

Suggested House Church Kit for Hosts

- How to invite people into your home
- How to maintain a comfortable, predictable size through personal invites and RSVP's
- How to create a hospitable environment without hugs and handshakes
- What to provide when people come over
- Order of worship/ activities
- If utilizing an online video teaching, provide technical tips for viewing the online experience in a group of 10-20
- How to best experience worship in a group of 10-20
- How to lead a discussion after sharing the online experience together
- How to provide for care in your group and where to go for help
- What to do if someone in your House Church exhibits symptoms and/ or is diagnosed with COVID-19 (communication, contact tracing, etc.)

Additional Gathering Ideas

- In person small gatherings
- Supplement with home church, Missional Communities
- Supplement with new online church
- Offer regular online church live-stream with interactions as well as pre-recorded service
- Offer an “on-property” outside venues
- Provide smaller, limited indoor gatherings within the church building with multiple venues

Point of Care Protocols

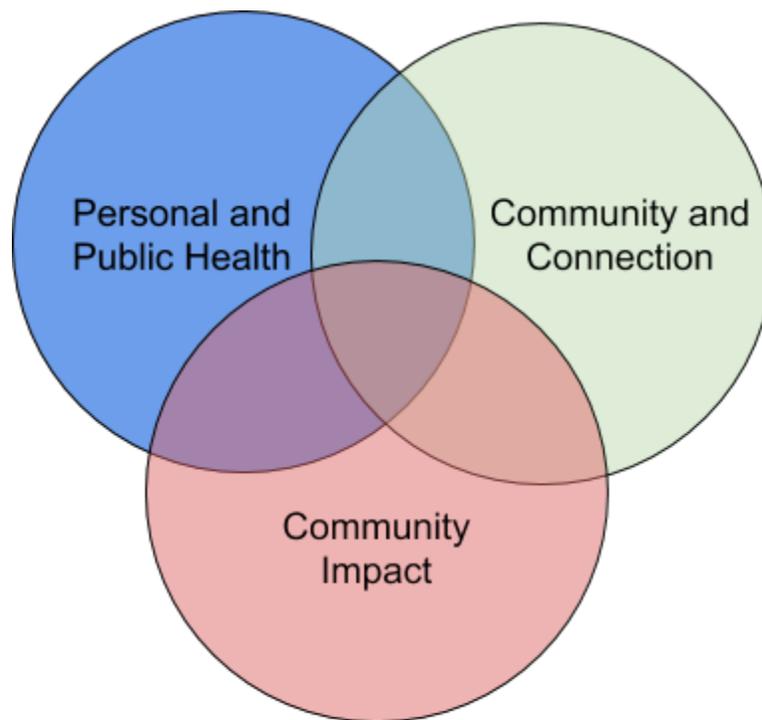
Will we have any “point-of-care” protocols in place that will require taking temperature readings or other symptomatic measures before people enter the building? Will we have requirements for staff and volunteers?

Additional Random Notes:

- We have the rest of our lives to do it the normal way.
- Rebels against what? Freedom? Health? Rules vs. wisdom
- What are our various platforms for online engagement?
- How is Jesus present, and what will happen when the spirit and the doors open? (Acts)
- Hebrews 10:25 says “Do not neglect gathering together...” and many have quoted this as reason for reopening our Sunday worship gatherings. What does this mean?
 - Note that in this context, the churches were primarily house churches
 - The larger context of this verse would at least include verse 24 and 25: “ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to

meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Key to this thought is that the meeting together is for the purpose of stirring each other up to love and good works and encouraging one another. This was done, at this time, house to house, and the focus here is love, good works, and encouragement and gathering is a means to doing this. In fact, for hundreds of years, the church had to gather in small groups in homes and in secret and not in large or public gatherings because of various threats.

- Where is the overlap and shared values space for various concerns among our people?



Finding the Sweet Spot

4 Pillars of Relaunch - Critical Questions¹²

Relaunching **CULTURE**

1. In what ways do we think COVID-19 has—or will—change culture . . .
 - a. within the US?
 - b. within our local community?
 - c. within our congregation?
2. Post-COVID-19, how will our church promote community and in-person connection after a season of social distancing and digital interactions?
3. What parts of the local community have we overlooked (or had a blind spot to) that the COVID situation made us see, and to whom we could now find a way to serve?
4. What community partnerships (businesses, organizations, other churches/ministries, non-profits, community leaders, other community service providers) are we developing now, or should we be developing, that will be the springboard to our new ministry opportunities to the culture post-COVID-19?
5. How do we think giving will be affected after the pandemic?
6. If our church were to be gone tomorrow, what is the number one thing our community would miss the most about us?
7. What cultural language do we want to continue to emphasize?
8. What phrases will we avoid going forward?
9. What phrases will we embrace?

Relaunching **LEADERSHIP**

1. Is our church staffing suitable for our next season of ministry?
2. Which staffing positions require increased technological skills and how will we address gaps in current abilities?
3. Do any new leadership roles emerge as a result of envisioning new ministry opportunities following COVID-19 (e.g. Outreach Pastor, Community Pastor, Online Pastor, etc)?
4. After a season of staff working remotely, are there changes we should make to our organizational structure or admin space?
5. In what ways does COVID-19 highlight the importance of and need for volunteer leaders, especially as it relates to mobilizing those in the church to connect, encourage and care for people outside the walls of our building and the walls of our ministries?

¹² Revised from [Relaunch Church Key Questions](#) by Aspen Group; includes questions from Tanner Smith and Geoff Surratt

6. How do we celebrate the good things people are doing as well as train, equip, and encourage people to continue positive leadership activities when we come back to the building?
7. What was revealed in our staff during the COVID crisis?
 - a. Did people rally as a team for what needed to happen?
 - b. What holes/gaps did we see that need addressing?
 - c. Communication issues or staff dynamics?
 - d. What new strengths emerged in our team?
8. In light of current events, is there anything we would change moving forward in terms of how we evaluate effectiveness? What now are the three major metrics we should be tracking?
9. What was possible that may not be possible for some time?
10. What was global or national that may need to be local for an extended time?
11. What seemed important that may feel superfluous now?
12. What was undervalued that may hold greater value now?
13. What “margin” or “lack of margin” was built into organizational norms?
14. What role do we play in local, national and global recovery?
15. What relationships of trust can be built on and strengthened in the next few weeks and months?
16. What do we consider our greatest assets, assuming that pandemic and economic disruptions continue for an extended period?
17. What considerable long-term changes in the big picture of our society — new realities that could come into being during the ice age — that I would like to be part of bringing about?

Relaunching **MINISTRY**

1. If we could start from scratch with our church calendar, what would we add or take away from our ministry programming?
2. What is the number one thing our church does really well? What is the most important thing to improve?
3. Should we make any changes in how we spend church funds?
4. What new ways of doing ministry that we adopted during the pandemic should carry over into the future of our church?
5. How will we engage/reengage with our financially supported missions, both local and global, following COVID-19?
6. As people are introduced to our church via our online presence during COVID-19, how are we engaging with them now and what’s the plan for when we meet them face-to-face?
7. What concerns will be on the minds of parents with small children and infants?

8. How can we assure parents that all workers have been tested and are free of COVID-19?
9. Should certain volunteers wear masks? Gloves?

Relaunching **FACILITIES**

1. In what ways has COVID-19 caused us to reconsider how we use our facilities? Can they be used for greater ministry impact?
2. Can our church serve as a 7-day-a-week facility instead of just a Sunday morning building?
3. How will social distancing practices change the way people gather and interact within our building? For instance, will we continue to pass a plate for the offering or promote online giving? How will we share communion?
4. How can our facility be better utilized by the community during times of crisis? What changes to the building would help facilitate community use?
5. After a time away, how are we seeing our facility with fresh eyes?
 - a. Are any spaces within the building outdated or ineffective for the ways our church uses them?
 - b. Is our building accommodating to guests and newcomers?
 - c. What sacred cows have we been holding onto that we can now let go of?
6. If we are considering remodeling, renovating or adding space (or even a new site), how can we translate that vision into the funds needed to make these changes?
7. If money were no object and we knew we could not fail because God was with us, what would we now see as the greatest need for changes to our ministry space?

Articles and Resources

- [Reopening the Church: A Discussion on Leading After COVID-19](#) featuring Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, Eric Geiger, Dave Dummitt, Bryan Carter, Josh Surratt, Jeanne Stevens, Dr. Rich Kannwischer
- [10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CONGREGATION BEFORE YOU REOPEN](#) by Greg Atkinson
April 28, 2020
- [Reopening the Church: A Discussion on Leading After COVID-19](#) by William Vanderbloemen
- [5 Shifts for Thriving in the New Normal](#) by Dave Ferguson
- [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) by the Center for Disease Control
- [Relaunch Church Key Questions](#) by Aspen Group
- [Relaunching Your Congregation – The What and How – Not the When](#) by Columbia Metro and George Bullard
- [Strategies for Winter: Redemptive Leadership in Survival Times](#) by Dave Blanchard, Andy Crouch, Jon Hart, Scott Kauffmann, and Jena Lee Nardella
- [What Relaunching the Church Might Look Like Over the Next 3–12 Months](#) by Ed Stetzer and Josh Laxton hi
- [Four Phases for an Orderly Return to Church](#) by Ken Brady
- [Reopening - Things to Think About](#) by Amplio
- [Guidelines for Churches Resuming Public Worship Services](#) by Citizens for Community Values
- [3 potential futures for COVID-19: Recurring small outbreaks, a monster wave, or a persistent crisis](#) by Sharon Begley
- [9 Marks - When Should Churches Reject Governmental Guidelines on Gathering?](#) 9 Marks Article looking at the overlap of authority and obligations to meet. Bottom line is to adhere to authority but good discussion
- [How to Prepare your Workplace for Returning to Work after COVID-19](#) DISHER Corp Blog
- [The Risks - Know Them and Avoid Them](#) by Erin Bromage
- [Returning to Church](#) from the Wisconsin Council of Churches
- [COVID-19 Re-entry Plan](#) by the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church
- [When States Don't Talk with Churches about Covid Timetables, Tensions Increase](#) by Ed Stetzer
- [If Costco can reopen safely, why not Illinois churches, Gov. Pritzker?](#) By Ed Stetzer