

Advices & Queries for Possibly Reopening Your Meeting House or Church

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A Note from the Authors: If you have suggested changes or additions to this document, please contact [FGC's Communications Team](#). We are grateful to FGC's Presiding Clerk (and retired medical doctor) **Frank Barch** for his input around public health recommendations.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands...

- Acts 17:24 King James Version (KJV)

The building is closed. The church is open.

- [Church Beyond Walls Facebook Meme](#)

Introduction

We know that some of you are beginning the discernment process with members and attenders of your meeting to possibly reopening your Quaker Meeting house during the COVID-19 pandemic. To aid your discernment, FGC has compiled the following advices, queries and safety strategies to help guide your Quaker community's decision-making. This document is not comprehensive and is offered simply to assist your process. Though we are all disappointed in the postponement of in-person worship during these times, **we encourage Friends to remember that while our physical meeting spaces are closed, Spirit moves wherever and however we find the means to gather as a community.** This includes using technology to hold Meeting for Worship virtually while we're apart.

We also want to strongly encourage you to consider guidance from government agencies (some links below) and to inquire with your Yearly Meeting to see if there might be additional resources and guidance available.

Lastly, know that while FGC itself has no meeting house, we are in discernment about when and how to safely reopen our main office in Philadelphia (the city is authorizing reopening in early June—we may or may not do so). We also traditionally hold in-person events and committee meetings. Know that all FGC in-person events and

meetings are now virtual through the end of this summer. We are in discernment about fall events and meetings.

Advices

Before you consider the queries, we thought it might be helpful to consider the following advices as a way to seed your discernment. If your meeting were to discern that it is time to re-open the meeting house, we encourage you to:

- **Determine what committee(s), working group(s) or Friends will act as point people related to meeting house safety** and hold responsibility for seeing reopening protocols implemented and followed.
- **Follow (or exceed) the guidelines of your state and local health department.** If your town or county does not have a health department, check out [Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith](#) from the CDC.
- **Clean and disinfect frequently-touched surfaces before and after Meeting for Worship each time you have it.** Be mindful of Friends with scent sensitivities and open windows in your meeting space to keep the fresh air circulating. If your Quaker community hosts Meeting for Worship multiple times in a day, consider staggering the start times (or offering them on different days) so Friends have ample time to clean and disinfect the meeting space before each worship.
- **Consider offering a virtual Meeting for Worship** (if you're not already doing so). There will likely be Friends who feel safer worshipping from home until a COVID-19 vaccine is available. If you choose to have in-person worship and open it to meeting attenders online, consider using a [Meeting Owl](#) or a laptop with a built-in web camera and video conferencing software like Zoom. Send out the details for participating in worship virtually the day before via email (don't forget to send written directions for how to connect and participate online, too!). Some meetings are considering the idea that they will offer separate in-person and online worships based on the comfort level and needs of their members and attenders.
- **Ask all attendees to wear face masks.** Face masks worn properly significantly decrease the risk of transmitting of COVID-19. Therefore, they are essential to protect Friends and participants with pre-existing health conditions and individuals who face a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. If visitors come to the meeting house without a mask, have spare masks handy or be prepared to encourage them to participate virtually or by phone from a safe distance outside the meeting house.
- **Install hand sanitizer stations at the entrance of your meeting space and throughout it.** If your Quaker community decides to hold worship outdoors, clearly identify hand sanitizer stations with signs and something hard-to-miss, like flowers or balloons, so Friends know they are available.
- **Encourage social distancing.** Meeting for Worship participants should sit or stand with a 6-foot radius of space around them at all times. Use non-physical forms of greeting when welcoming Friends into the meeting house and at the rise of meeting ([try these no-contact greeting alternatives instead](#)). If your

worship room is traditionally full, consider having multiple worships to enable proper spacing between chairs.

- **Temporarily suspend activities that are high-risk for spreading the coronavirus.** This means not having hymnals out in the meeting space and not doing potlucks for a while. Group singing may be possible if it is held outside and everyone is wearing a mask. Childcare and First Day School are also possible so long as Friends consider [following CDC guidelines](#) for keeping children and volunteers safe. Also, stop using shared hand towels and use disposable paper towels in kitchens and bathrooms.
- **Give opportunities for feedback after reopening the meeting house.** Despite good planning, some safety issues may only become apparent when the first worship is held. Give ample opportunities for Friends to suggest ways to increase safety and increase confidence in the procedures being used.

Queries

Reopening the doors of your meeting house amidst so much uncertainty, and when so many Friends in the FGC community face a much higher risk of contracting the novel coronavirus, is, as you know, not a decision to make lightly. Having read the advices, consider the following queries together (via phone or videoconference):

- **Does our meeting/church have the capacity to provide a sacred space that is reasonably safe and adheres to the regulations of our local health department and/or CDC guidelines?**
 - In other words, do we have the volunteers, social distancing resources (like face masks), cleaning supplies, meeting house space, and budget available to keep high-use surfaces clean and to create a 6-foot no-contact radius around each participant?
- **Will members and attenders of our meeting feel safe and comfortable enough to gather in-person if we reopen now? Will visiting Friends, newcomers, and spiritual seekers feel safe?**
- **Do we have a communications process set up to share reopening protocols to new and returning Friends (wear a face mask, remain six feet apart, use no-contact methods of greeting) and to let community members and visitors know when in-person Meeting for Worship is cancelled?**
- **From a public safety and pastoral care standpoint, are we prepared to address the consequences of an infected participant (with or without symptoms) attending in-person worship and potentially spreading the infection to people we know and love in our community?**

We know this is a lot to consider, while being essential to the well-being of all those we love. May your discernment be grounded in love and may the movement of Spirit guide you to the best possible outcome during a challenging time without easy answers.