

# Draft Guidelines for Worship in Later Coronavirus Times

as of 5/23/20

The following is a summary of key points for church sessions to consider in order to plan and hold worship when it is less risky to hold in-person worship services. Because it is likely that our community will continue to ask churches to wait a few weeks before opening in-person gatherings, your session can consider the following guidelines, and give feedback this week. The State of California is expected to issue guidelines for faith communities this week, so a Presbytery-wide policy may become available by the beginning of June. Please send feedback and/or questions to [wendytajima@sangabpres.org](mailto:wendytajima@sangabpres.org).

Remember that in our polity, the session is responsible for planning and holding worship services for their congregation. Sessions are encouraged to consider the needs of their congregation, the guidance of public health experts and your insurance company, and above all your understanding of faithful worship that glorifies God and builds up the congregation. As your session discerns future worship plans, you may remember the following guides from the *Directory for Worship*:

- W-1.0101: Christian worship gives all glory and honor, praise and thanksgiving to the holy, triune God. We are gathered in worship to glorify the God who is present and active among us—particularly through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. We are sent out in service to glorify the same God who is present and active in the world.
- W-1.0202: Because God is the author of history, we may worship at any time.
- W-1.0203: Because heaven and earth belong to God, we may worship in any place.
- W-2.0201: The order of worship should provide for and encourage the participation of all; no one is to be excluded.
- W-2.0202: Every action in worship is to glorify God and contribute to the good of the people. Worshipers and worship leaders must avoid actions that only call attention to themselves and fail to serve the needs of the whole congregation.
- W-2-2.0305: In fulfilling their responsibilities for worship, sessions are accountable to presbytery. It is appropriate that the presbyteries discuss with sessions the character of their congregation's worship, the standards governing it, and the fruit that it bears in the mission and ministry of the church. It is appropriate that the presbyteries provide instruction in worship, making use of this *Directory for Worship* in the preparation of candidates for ordination, and in the ongoing nurture of ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Los Angeles County has organized their guidelines around five areas that are useful to remember. As you discern how and when to offer in-person worship, consider the following:

## 1. Protecting and supporting the health and safety of all

- Design worship that fully includes all persons in worship, whether they are in the church building or on-line. It may help to consider your main worshipping body to be at home.
- Ensure that persons who have a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19—and certainly anyone who has symptoms of illness—stay home and participate in worship on-line. See “People at Higher Risk” for more information.
- Require that masks be worn by all persons while on the church campus, and have masks available if anyone arrives without one.

## 2. Ensuring appropriate physical distancing

- Block off seats/pews so that household groups are separated by 6 feet or more.
- Consider guidelines of LA County public health experts regarding occupancy (when set), such as keeping groups under 10 or 25 maximum, which may mean multiple small worship groups (or encourage all to worship from home)—this makes possible contact tracing more manageable.
- Consider guidelines (when set) that occupancy be kept to 25% of the maximum occupancy of the worship space, in order to maintain adequate distancing.
- Consider gathering outdoors, which is considered safer than enclosed spaces.
- Do not have congregational or group singing, or use of wind instruments. Utilize instrumental or recorded music, soloists (or a few voices properly distanced—more than 10 feet at least—from each other and the congregation), or utilizing motions to accompany music.

## 3. Ensuring proper infection control

- Maintain easy access to hand sanitizer or handwashing stations.
- Schedule regular cleaning of common areas after every service or gathering.
- Remove everything that is not required (to minimize the number of objects that will be touched and therefore need cleaning).
- Keep doors propped open when possible.
- Minimize touch—when passing the peace, giving offering (on-line or drop in baskets/boxes), taking communion (offer elements shared by group), use projection rather than hymnals or bulletins.
- No shared or self-served food.
- Minimize personal interactions outside worship.
- Close off areas not necessary for worship.

## 4. Communicating with the public

- Maintain support for pastoral care and worship inclusion for all, whether or not they can safely enter the church building.
- Provide proper signage on-site to instruct people of proper protocols.
- Find volunteers who will gently remind people of protocols.
- Design a no-touch system for recording all in-person attendees, to aid in contact tracing if needed.
- Keep track of weddings, funerals, baptisms, ordinations/installations that had to be delayed or minimized; consider when they can be celebrated (eg mentioning at worship), or scheduled at a later date, on the first anniversary, or at combined services.

## 5. Ensuring equitable access to services for vulnerable populations

- Ensure that all people are included in worship, whether they worship in-building or on-line.
- Maintain pastoral care systems to keep all members connected.
- Maintain commitment to care for the most vulnerable among us, including people experiencing homelessness, people without immigration rights and/or jobs, and people feeling the stress and other negative impacts of the extended pandemic.