

Rebooting the church campus in the wake of Covid-19: A practical conversation guide

As federal and state guidelines are changing from quarantine and shelter-in-place to reengagement with businesses and communities, it is imperative to understand that the world has changed significantly. The church has changed, as well, with respect to how we worship, equip, and, above all, make disciples.

As government “orders” were peeled back like layers of an onion, so implementation strategies for returning to public gatherings,

church events, and public worship will experience a “rolling out” of guidelines. Some states should anticipate different guidelines county by county.

It is critical for churches to begin preparing now for the return of on-campus activities. A plan should include several dynamics including spiritual, leadership, and personal goals. The purpose of this guide is to help your church implement new methods, policies, and procedures.

Spiritual: Don't stop leaning into the Lord and seeking His ways

The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed a pause button on the way many believers and their local churches normally operate. It's as if our Lord has used this time to say, “Be still and listen. I want to do something new and magnificent.”

Thanks to Covid-19, the church – the people of God – must take certain vital actions in a post-Covid-19 world. Take a look at the verbs in the list below:

1. Focus on the solitary mission of making gospel disciples; become less programmatic
2. Exercise humility before God and with people; surrender pride and self-righteousness at the foot of the cross
3. Invest in a Spirit-filled, prayerful lifestyle; remember what God can do in a moment
4. Plunge into the Word of God for nourishment and instruction
5. Be less strident and skeptical; choose kindness and understanding toward one another
6. Embrace the new tools for communicating with people as a standard practice
7. Instead of building mega-buildings, consider starting more autonomous local churches shepherded by larger churches
8. Face the brevity of life with the glorious victory we have in Christ over sin and death
9. Be responsible for future generations with choices that may impact religious liberty
10. Stop attempting to fill everyone's activity list; celebrate what the Lord wills to do through His people
11. Without intimidation, and as a part of your daily conversation in person (6 feet apart) or online, share the gospel daily by speaking much of Him

12. Be a conduit of generosity to your local church; now may be the time to train a new generation in storehouse tithing

Above all, “draw near to God and He will draw near to you . . .” (James 4:8). A microbe on the other side of the planet may have kicked this pandemic off, but the Lord

Logistical considerations

As soon as the lifting of orders by the governor and/or municipal authorities occurs, some basic logistical items need to be addressed before you invite people onto your campus. As with everything that we do for the Lord, we should strive for excellence. Now is the time to walk your campus with fresh eyes in regard to upkeep and cleanliness. The overall appearance of your campus speaks to guests louder than ever about your focus towards their health. Form a logistics task force and ask the following questions:

may use anything to get our attention. We would waste this season if we fail to go deeper in our relationship with the Lord our God. Be intentional, come to Him, and make a fresh surrender to the Lord. There is no greater priority for a church during the Covid-19 pandemic than to seek the Lord.

1. Are there medical professionals or county health department personnel you could work with to help develop best practices related to the health of your guests?
2. Who will provide campus “policing” of the protocols? More specifically, who will work under the authority of the pastor/elders to keep an eye on the basic health protocols for the next 2-6 months?

Cleaning/Sanitizing before guests arrive

Protocols should be implemented to reduce the spread of the virus on campus (remember, the virus is not eradicated). Consider:

1. What areas of the church need to be deep-cleaned before anyone returns to campus?
2. Who can be recruited to do this? (Volunteers, church staff)
3. What resources do they need? (Cleaning materials – are they generally available or do they need to be ordered?)
4. What ongoing (daily, weekly, monthly) cleaning protocols need to be developed and implemented once you are meeting on campus again?

Contact protocols while guests are on campus

Discuss procedures and processes to minimize personal contact. Frequently sanitize high-touch surfaces when guests are on campus. Consider:

1. What resources need to be purchased and stationed throughout the campus for use while people gather (for example, hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray/wipes)? Availability of these supplies might be limited and prioritized to healthcare facilities. How will you gather them?
2. What measures could you implement to curtail the spread of germs while people are on campus (for example, greeters

wiping down doorknobs, bathrooms cleaned at least once during morning, sanitizing between services)?

Get ready for company

As you walk your campus with fresh eyes in preparation for a return to on-campus activities, make note of items that need attention. Consider:

1. What areas of the campus need an additional refresh or tidying up to exhibit a better overall cleanliness?

Leadership

Leading well through this time of uncertainty is essential. Gather prayerfully with your leadership team to navigate this time of transition. Evaluate the mission to which God has called your church and identify how you may continue to impact your community. Make sure your leadership team has “buy in” to the church’s mission. If they are not sold on it and they are marginally supportive, focus your time on a mission that expresses who you are as a church. There will naturally be new ministry opportunities to develop, and very likely there are some prior ministry programs that may be obsolete. Consider:

1. How can you communicate to your church and community the steps you are taking to maintain clean and safe

3. What are acceptable greetings instead of handshakes or a hugs? Remember, we need to start with a 6-foot separation.

2. What is the cost of these projects?
3. Who can be recruited to do this? (Volunteers, church staff)
4. What resources do they need?
5. What are priorities based on need and availability of resources?

- conditions on campus and a relevant ministry future?
2. What good habits has your church embraced these past months that you need to immediately integrate (for example, care through small groups, digital communication)?
3. What should you stop doing? What should you begin? What ministries do you need to continue to pause due to Covid-19?
4. Do church staff changes need to be made (for example, change in position responsibilities to address new ministry needs)?
5. Are your governing documents in order so you can do business on line?

Worship services—what will they look like?

Adapting elements in your service and church programming for “loving distance” will be helpful for the near future. Consider:

1. What adjustments in seating could you create to foster wise distancing (for example, adding a service, spacing chairs, encouraging “spread”)?
2. What alternatives to passing the offering plate and Lord’s Supper trays

(where everyone handles them) could be implemented while still highlighting giving as worship and encouraging corporate participation in the Lord’s Supper?

3. What alternate pathways of connecting could you implement to limit physical interaction (for example, creating digital welcome cards or sermon

responses, putting worship guides on tables, removing hymnals and using projection only)?

4. Do policies and procedures for celebrating believer's baptism need to be discussed?

Evaluate ministries in light of how people feel, not by the numbers

When people leave their homes to gather, addressing ministry needs is more complex. The church must be prepared for immediate logistical and personal realities. People will not be the same when they return. This is the residual of a nationwide crisis – people grieve and should be given space to grieve. This is a process of crisis management. New opportunities to minister exist, starting with the way people feel as a result of forced change. Consider:

1. How could you create a hybrid between on-campus and online platforms for those unable or hesitant to return to campus in the near future, or for the broader community wanting to remain connected from afar (for example, small

groups, prayer meetings, ministry teams/committees, etc.)?

2. Will your church continue to offer childcare during services in the same way it did before? If so, what additional precautions will you take in this area (for example, temperature checks, snack time modification/elimination)?
3. What preparations do you need to begin making now to be ready for adjustments to your summer programming (for example, VBS – on campus, virtual or at home)?
4. How will you address the personal and family struggles that may have surfaced in the last couple of months (for example, marriage or financial strain, emotional or physical abuse, job loss)?

Financial – keep the church in order

Financial planning is critical as you plan to reopen your church campus. Consider:

1. What has been the impact on tithes and offerings? Can you project long-term trends on giving? What is the bottom-line impact of these giving trends?
2. Cleaning and contact efforts will be an ongoing expense that is most likely beyond current spending plans. How will you fund these required resources (donations of cleaning supplies, financial adjustments, etc.)?
3. What new ministry opportunities have you identified and what are the associated costs?

4. How could you make immediate church-budget adjustments?
5. Have you led the church to consider the missionaries supported through the Cooperative Program, Annie Armstrong Offering for North American Missions, Missouri Missions Offering, Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions, and others? These are real people called by God and sent by your church to minister in difficult places. They are trusting you and your church to hold the rope even in difficult times.
6. What creative things are you doing to help church members who have lost their jobs?

Remember: Your association and state convention teams are here to help. Please reach out with specific questions, concerns, or ideas.

Our thanks to the Florida Baptist Convention for their contribution to this document.