**Guidance for Places of Worship**

**Reopening During COVID-19 Pandemic**

These are recommendations for churches in Webster County to begin to meet again inside their church buildings in a way that will help protect their members’ health as well as minister to their spiritual needs. Church leaders must understand that whenever they choose to open their facilities, they now have a greater social responsibility for keeping everyone safe. Church leaders are encouraged to prepare their facilities and educate their members on their plans prior to opening. According to the Missouri Statewide Order 20-09 and Show-Me Strong Recovery Plan Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions, as long as the social distancing requirements are followed, places of worship are allowed to hold in-person services. Using alternative means of services through live streaming, Facebook live, or pre-recorded are also encouraged.

A strategic “reopening” of Webster County will not be successful without proactive steps being taken to stop the resurgence of COVID-19. The Webster County Health Unit recognizes the individuality and uniqueness of every organization, and understands that not all of the recommendations herein are applicable to everyone. Church leaders are encouraged to put in place as many of these recommendations as possible to safeguard themselves, their staff/volunteers, church members, and the community at large.

**Social Distancing**

* Church leaders should encourage families to sit together as a family unit but be seated at least 6 ft. from other families. Consider having a complete row of chairs or a pew in front and behind the family units in order to have the adequate 6 ft. social distancing in place.
* Hugs and hand-shakes should be strongly discouraged for at least the next month if not longer.
* Post Social Distancing reminders on doors, video screens, and make announcements.
* Strongly encourage the members that if they are ill to please stay home and watch the service online until they are feeling better.
* Church leaders should try to limit their attendance during any given service by adding more service time options in order to accommodate the decreased capacity in order to accommodate the 6 ft. social distancing requirement. Other considerations may be adding a service on Saturday, opening up the fellowship hall or balconies for seating with video screens.
* Strongly encourage those members who are at high risk (60 and older, have chronic illness, are immunocomprised) to watch the services online from the safety of their homes.
* It is recommended that churches not hold Sunday School, small groups, or any special dinners or events that would bring a crowd.
* It is recommended that churches not offer nursery or children’s church ministries.

**Other Considerations**

* Have plenty of hand sanitizer in various locations and encourage frequent usage.
* Do a good, thorough cleaning after each service to include wiping down door handles, restrooms, counter tops, and all other frequently touched surfaces such as chairs/pews.
* Discontinue the self-serve hospitality items, e.g. coffee, donuts, etc.
* Shorten service times to 45 minutes or less in order to cut down the exposure time and decrease the number of people needing to use the restroom.
* It is not recommended to “pass the offering plate/bucket/pouch” from person to person. Some ideas to consider would be placing a “giving box” at the entrance, online giving, mailing in the tithes and offerings, or one person holding the plate at all times.
* Ushers are encouraged to wear gloves when counting the money.
* It would be recommended to not have communion right away and then use individual communion packets as a viable alternative.