

Providence CRC - Reopening Campus Plan

Introduction

The last few months have been new terrain for us all. Due to the coronavirus and government restrictions we have all had to adjust how we live, school, work, play and even how we do church. It is safe to say we all eagerly look forward to the day when we can once again resume life together. Back in March, our Executive Team held a special meeting and made the difficult decision to suspend all “in-person” church activities that did not provide an essential service to our community. We felt this was the best way to love our neighbor while protecting the health and well-being of our church family and broader community.

Since suspending activities, we have continued to seek out creative new ways to keep our church family connected via a variety of different platforms. Along with those efforts you, our church family, have been incredible in offering care and encouragement to one another! We are so grateful for all of the ways you have stepped up during this time.

As we share the ways in which we have been blessed during this time it is also important to acknowledge how hard it has been. We grieve the programs and events we have missed out on. We grieve not being able to celebrate God’s blessings and mourn our losses together. This has been difficult and we all long to be able to once again do life together physically. Though we all share this desire to be together, leadership needs to weigh this desire with the present realities we are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On **May 18** an Advisory Team was formed to develop a strategy for how to relaunch gathered ministry (worship, fellowship, etc.) on our church campus. The team started its work by listening intentionally; listening to recommendations and guidelines given by government and public health officials; listening to how other local churches are responding; listening to our members, staff and Pastors through a survey and individual feedback; most importantly listening to the leading of God’s Spirit through prayer and the wisdom of scripture.

We have gathered what we have learned to develop a proposal we believe will help us best navigate the next season of ministry at Providence Church.

Please know this should be considered a working document that gives guidance and direction to help us navigate new terrain that seems to be constantly changing. It could change. We continue to ask our members for their understanding, grace and continued prayers as our leadership does its best to care for the needs and well-being of our church family and community.

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Principles that Continue to Guide our Response

Mission and Vision: Our mission is “*to glorify God by demonstrating HIS love to our church family and community.*” Our 2025 Vision is to “Reclaim our Tables with the LORD in our HOMES, CHURCH, and COMMUNITY.”

1. We will continue to be guided by our **mission** to glorify God by demonstrating HIS love to our church family and community while creatively living into our **vision** of reclaiming our tables in our HOMES, CHURCH and COMMUNITY during this unique season.

LOVE: Love God. Love People. (*Matthew 22:37-40*)

2. We will diligently work toward finding safe ways to worship our God together, recognizing this important way we express our love to God as a community. (Psalm 100)
3. We will focus on what is best for the whole Providence Family and our surrounding community (e.g. members, attenders, and guests of all ages). (cf. Philippians 2:3-4)
4. We will be mindful of and care for the most vulnerable - the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions (e.g. immunocompromised), frontline medical personnel, and their families. (cf. Matthew 25:40)

UNITY: In Christ we are One body (*Romans 12:5*)

5. We will, in striving to be Christ-like to one another and the world, follow the Holy Spirit's leading in coming “alongside” one another, staying connected, and promoting the community of Christ. (Ephesians 4:2-3)
6. We will seek to honor our differing concerns and desires with humility and grace with a willingness to compromise for the sake of the well-being and unity of the church.

WITNESS: Known by our Love (*John 13:35*)

7. We will be a positive witness of Jesus Christ by our love for one another and our community.
8. We will, to the best of our ability, honor federal, state, and local health department guidelines, and denominational recommendations. (cf. Romans 13:1)

EFFECTIVENESS: Consider our Fruitfulness (*Gal. 6:9; Col. 1:10*)

9. We will continue to discern what is fruitful and effective in our members' lives.
10. We will be persistent and creative as we find fruitful ways to meet those shared needs of our church family within safe parameters. (Galatians 6:9)

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Phase A - “Stay Home, Stay Safe”

Implementation:

- Kent County under “Stay Home” executive order issued by Gov. Whitmer
- Kent County within stages 1, 2, or 3 of [Michigan’s Safe Start Plan](#)

Application:

- Church building remains closed to all members with exception only to personnel staff and those identified to participate with worship.
- With communicated hours of availability, office staff facilitate emails, calls, and texts in regard to church services and business.
- Worship continues to be offered as a livestream service at 9:30 am on Sunday mornings and recorded for later viewing, if desired.
- Devotions and prayer offered via livestream twice weekly by pastoral staff.

Consideration:

- Encourage members to engage with RightNow Media for Bible study/discipleship either independently or virtually with a small group.
- All necessary church or ministry meetings will occur virtually with participants remaining in their homes.
- Pastors, council, and care teams will continue to support members using phone calls, text messages, emails, and mailed cards or words of encouragement/comfort.

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Phase B - Small Gatherings

Implementation:

- Kent County is no longer under a “Stay at Home” executive order.
- Kent County within stage 4 (*Improving*) of [Michigan's Safe Start Plan](#)

Application:

- Church building will be open with limitations to allow staff, members attending small in-person meetings and those identified to participate with worship.
- With communicated hours of availability, office staff facilitate emails, calls, and texts in regard to church services and business.
- Worship continues to be offered as a livestream service at 9:30 am on Sunday mornings and recorded for later viewing, if desired.
- Devotions and prayer offered via livestream twice weekly by pastoral staff.

Consideration:

- Encourage members to meet with a few other members and/or neighbors to worship
 - Limit gatherings to 8-12 persons and observe recommended CDC guidelines [CDC Guidelines - Prevent Getting Sick](#)
 - Suggestions: Watch livestream service together, lead own time of prayer, praise and reflection, etc.
 - Gatherings could occur in a variety of locations at home such as large porch/deck, backyard, driveway, etc.
 - Great opportunity for neighbor observation, and hopefully inclusion
 - Small groups, Momentum groups, summer Sunday evening programs, etc.
- In-person meetings may resume for groups determined by gathering size allowed at the state government level and our ability to provide a safe and protected environment.
- Staff will continue to creatively find ways to offer ministry to members that align with current state government restrictions.
- Evaluation of the ability to offer outdoor worship services.

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Phase C - Medium Gatherings

Implementation:

- Kent County within stage 5 (*Containing*) of [Michigan's Safe Start Plan](#)

Application:

- The church building will be open for staff and accessible by members for set durations of time to be communicated by church leadership.
- Worship services will be recorded/live streamed with some members in attendance.
 - Participants will be determined by gathering size allowed at the state government level, our ability to provide a safe and protected worship environment, and intentional rotation of desired attendance.
 - Majority of members will still be participating in worship virtually.
- Social distancing and other safety protocols are encouraged for all application items included in Phase C of the reopening plan.
 - Protocols could include safe distancing, wearing a mask, having temperature checked prior to building entry, assigned seating, no handshaking/touching, immediate exit of the building.
 - Appropriate cleaning plans according to current CDC guidelines will be rolled out.

Consideration:

- Worship practice and tools used for worship will look different during this time.
 - Expectations may include but are not limited to the removal of Bibles, hymnals, and pens from pews, no distribution of bulletins, coffee, cookies or shared communion products, no inclusion of door greeters or mid-service greetings, no use of offering plates, no sharing of microphone equipment or availability of kids ministry bags, re-evaluation of length/frequency of congregational singing due to contamination risk extending beyond 6 feet, etc.
- Nursery, children's worship, Sunday School, catechism, Gems, Cadets, Refuel, youth group, adult discipleship classes, etc. may be available on campus during this time with restrictions.

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Phase D - Large Gatherings

Implementation:

- Kent County within stage 6 (*Post-Pandemic*) of [Michigan's Safe Start Plan](#)

Application:

- The church building will be open normal business hours Monday through Friday for staff and members.
- In-person meetings of all participant sizes may resume while observing safe distancing and other safety protocols.
- Worship services will be available to all members/guests who feel safe to attend while adhering to current protocols and guidelines.
- The worship service will continue to be available live stream and recorded.
- Special considerations for worship practice may still be in place (e.g. no greeting, different communion protocol, etc.).
- Children, youth, and adult ministries will be initiated while being cognizant of current protocols.
 - Nursery and during service children's worship would resume with new parameters and guidelines aligned with safety protocols.

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Phase E - A “New” Normal

Implementation:

- When a vaccine and/or antidote for Covid-19 is generally available OR when Kent County has been in the post-pandemic stage for an appropriate period of time.

Application:

- The church building will resume normal ministry hours.
- In-person meetings of all participant sizes may resume while observing safe distancing and other safety protocols.
- Worship service(s) will be available to all members/guests who feel safe to attend while adhering to current protocols and guidelines.
- The worship service will continue to be available live stream and recorded.
- Worship practices communicated during Phase C and D will be reviewed for what continues, what can return to pre-pandemic practice, and what must still be changed.
- Ministries resume while adhering to safety protocols.

Consideration:

- Committee(s) development to intentionally review and discuss
 - Building/facility needs to meet “new normal” expectations
 - Items/steps offered during pandemic that should remain in place

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Notes and Disclaimers

1. It may be necessary to go back and forth between phases if outbreaks reoccur within Kent County as communicated by state leaders.
2. As long as this virus remains in the community, and until there is a vaccine and/or antidote, there will be an inherent risk of gathering together. As the church proceeds with caution to restart ministries and gatherings, participants are reminded to be aware of the risks to themselves and others of the spread of this disease. This is especially important for members over the age of 60 years, members with chronic illness or immune deficiency, and those members living in a household with high risk occupants, including medical care givers and first responders. People are encouraged to use wise judgment.

Reopening Plan Team Members

Eric Timmer - chair

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Source List & Additional Resources

[Kent County Health Department COVID Data](#) – Kent County Health Department
[Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, And Homes](#)—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
[What Relaunching the Church Might Look Like Over the Next 3-12 Months](#)—Christianity Today
[Coming Back Together After Coronavirus](#)—CRCNA's *Church Juice*
[Community and Faith-Based Organizations](#)—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
[Basic Guide for Returning to Your Church Building After COVID-19](#)—Georgia Baptist Mission Board
[48 Questions to Ask Before Reopening Your Church](#)—Ken Braddy, LifeWay Christian Resources
[Children's Ministry During COVID-19](#)—CRCNA's Faith Formation Ministries
[Sustainability in Worship](#)—CRCNA's *Church Juice*
[Guidelines for West Michigan Places of Worship as the COVID-19 Pandemic Continues](#)—CRCNA
[The Risks—Know Them—Avoid Them](#) by Dr. Erin Bromage
[How Long Does the Coronavirus Live on Surfaces?](#) – WebMD
[MI Safe Start Plan](#) – State of Michigan
[COVID-Safe Church Guidelines](#) – Premier Productions