



The Plexiglass Option

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It's been hard, I know, to be away from each other and from the familiarity of our church buildings. We find comfort in our faith community with whom we've shared so much, both the joys and the hardships. We've invested long hours in the building, either engaging in ministry for each other and the community or ministry for the maintenance of the building itself. It's hard to see the building sit empty, while we sit at home.

So, there has been great energy around the prospect of opening back up. The Presbytery has issued [guidance](#) to our pastors and sessions about the practicalities of reopening. Because a phased approach to reopening will mean we can't throw our doors wide open and return to our past level of activity, we'll have to think creatively and strategically.

If we get to the stage where small groups can begin to gather – and we are not there yet medically – how can we do so safely? Nationally, a lot of innovation is going toward spacing in the pews, removing all hymnals/offering plates/Bibles/attendance sheets, prohibiting passing of the peace and potlucks, distributing face masks, having people posted at the bathrooms to sanitize after each use, using tongs to distribute communion, and even walling off each pew with plexiglass dividers like they do in the grocery store. All these precautions and more are circulating as ways to keep our members safe.

I wonder, though, are we really that anxious to get back in our sanctuaries? Knowing the severe health risks that gathering will have, is our creative energy best spent contorting our traditions and jerry-rigging our holy spaces, so that we can get back to normal? We might be back in the building, but it won't feel normal. Public health experts are advising it's not going to be "normal" for a long, long time.

Cindy Kohlmann, Co-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly recently posed these questions:

Do we want to use the resources of time, talent, and treasure available to us to figure out protocols and practicalities for opening buildings in a way that might help people stay safe but will not be guaranteed...

Or...

Do we want to use the resources of time, talent, and treasure available to us to be the body of Christ dispersed and deployed until it is safe for all people to return to our buildings without restrictions?

So many people are struggling today. Lines for food distribution stretch for hours; people are out of work; families are grieving the loss of loved ones to the virus; health care costs imperil even those with employment; small businesses are struggling to stay afloat. It's going to take all of the time, talent, and treasure that we have to address these immediate needs, even on a small scale. Is installing plexiglass our highest calling in this moment?

Or, could we plow under the grass outside our buildings to plant community gardens? Could we organize job opportunities for people who have much to offer, matching them with people who are willing to pay for help? Or,



could our parking lots or fellowship halls become sites for Red Cross blood drives, under the watchful eye of health professionals who are accustomed to setting up temporary, clean spaces? Could we make calls to encourage voter registration? Could we offer to pay the daycare costs for hospital workers or other frontline responders?

Tippecanoe Church has just begun a new initiative in the South Side of Milwaukee called [Hungry Hearts Community Meals](#), which will feed up to 300 people each Saturday using restaurant-prepared meals. It addresses a tangible hunger problem, while helping local restaurants stay in business. It needs [your support](#).

As we mourn the loss of “normal” for the foreseeable future, we have a choice. We can focus on the plexiglass option, or we can be the body of Christ “dispersed and deployed.” Both will take tremendous creativity, energy, and resources, and we might have only enough to go one direction. I pray you will give equal consideration to both choices, attend carefully to the safety of your members, watch closely for the Spirit’s leading, and dare to try something new, if only for this year.