

to COVID-19 Safety Protocols

July 27, 2020

“I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial.

‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive.

No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.” 1 Cor. 10:23-24

Individual compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols is key to reducing viral transmission and protecting our communities. Unfortunately, compliance requires change of long-ingrained customs, social behaviors, hygiene habits, and also impacts our appearance in public. In a society that values individual freedoms, the church is called to establish a culture of mutual respect in which compliance to safety protocols becomes a demonstration of love and concern for the safety of others. This challenge has become more difficult as compliance issues have become politicized, and some congregants are influenced by some political leaders and media sources which have promoted messages at odds with scientific and medical professionals and the Center for Disease Control.

Compliance of church members, guests, and building users to COVID-19 safety protocols (such as mask wearing, social distancing, and hygiene) is essential for the good of all who enter the building or outdoor spaces for in-person activities. Before re-entering church facilities or in-person activities, please develop plans in writing to assist leaders and members with compliance. These plans shall include training for church staff, leaders, and key volunteers to equip them with successful, positive strategies to ensure compliance while building a warm and welcoming church environment. Each congregation is unique and will need to develop its own strategies for various church activities. These principles and tips will be helpful.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate Clear Expectations Before Re-Entry to the Building

- Make the message biblical. The 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 passage above is a good one. So is almost any passage on loving or serving one’s neighbor. Teach compliance as Christian love and respect for neighbor. Consider weaving this message into preaching and other forms of teaching before re-entry. Create posters/signs that connect COVID-19 protocols with Christian love and care.
- Well in advance of inviting people to return to the building, communicate all of the safety protocols the church is taking to protect the community, and changes they should expect to see. Tell people what will be expected of them.
- Use every communication tool you have with church members and visitors: US Mail a packet of information; email reminders; website; send group texts; post on social media; phone tree calls; put up posters outside & inside building; laminate protocol cards.
- Encourage sick persons to stay home but explain how you will keep them connected.
- Be clear about expectations for check-in, attendance record keeping, mask wearing, handwashing, and social distancing. Communicate any changes in format of worship with alternative options (i.e. no singing or humming, but freedom to stand and raise hands in praise

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during instrumental music; changes in passing the peace of Christ, offering, fellowship time, and children's programming)

- Continue video, livestream, and the other forms of dispersed education, fellowship and worship that you have developed in this season so that all the people of your congregation can participate, especially those most vulnerable to COVID-19 or those who are sick.
- Make personal contact with everyone over the age of 65 (and other vulnerable people), to express love and concern, and urge them to continue participating via livestream or other methods you've developed. Encourage any actions they are taking to avoid risks and help them understand that coming to in-person church could be a risky environment for them until a vaccine is widely available and used. Discuss their spiritual and emotional needs and alternative ways for these to be met.

Gain Agreement to Comply *Before* Participation

- Require RSVPs/reservations for services and events to assure you can accommodate the number of persons attending. At the time of RSVP, remind each person of basic protocols and have each person confirm their agreement to comply with them.
- If possible, get their agreement in writing or by electronic consent by using a covenant like the samples provided by the Presbytery.

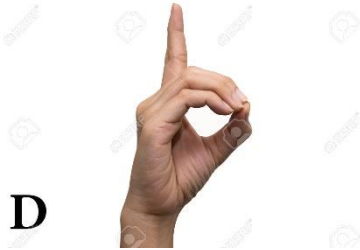
Model and Affirm Compliance Everywhere

- When church staff, leaders, and key volunteers visibly model compliance for participants and frame it as a matter of love for others, it makes an impression.
- Consider parking lot/entry point attendants who wear masks to greet people in the parking lot/entry point. If persons arrive not wearing masks, attendants can inquire if they have one in the car. Or if worshippers need one, provide one.
- Take time during the first gatherings at the church to remind people of the agreed behaviors and why. Make this simple, fun, and engaging (maybe a mock "flight safety" presentation).
- Clearly mark pews or rows that are off-limits due to social distancing. Consider using humorous signs like [these](#) to gain compliance.
- Liturgists, musicians, ushers, preachers all wearing a mask helps to establish a new cultural norm. Publicly express appreciation to the congregation for compliance.
- Encourage staff to go the extra mile in modeling compliance – including wearing masks in social settings and public spaces where others may not be wearing masks.
- Consider creating some kind of a sticker or button with a positive message expressing appreciation to one another for compliance.

Plan and Train for Correction: Here are Some Strategies

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- Correct at check-in: If everyone stops at a check-in-station for a basic health screening, or to have their name registered as present in the building, it is a perfect time to explain what the requirements are and why we are doing it. Have extra masks available as well as a hand washing station / hand sanitizer.
- If someone says they do not want to comply, listen to what the person is saying, communicate understanding of what they have said by active listening, and use the kindest tone of voice to explain the requirements for churches and the congregation's agreement to follow this. Give the person the choice to comply or not to participate. If they choose not to participate, provide information for how they can participate online.
- When observing lapses of compliance, assume people have simply forgotten the agreement and just need a little reminder. Give them some time to self-correct, but remind them if they seem to have forgotten.
- Consider creating a non-verbal sign that people can use to gently remind one another of the protocols. The ASL letter "D" might be a good one:
"D" represents both Distancing and Disinfecting.
At the beginning of each gathering, you can teach this and empower people to remind one another. If they remind one another, less policing will need to take place.
Use humor when appropriate. "Don't risk a 'Double D.'"

A close-up photograph of a right hand in a specific ASL gesture for the letter 'D'. The index finger points straight up, the thumb is tucked in, and the other three fingers are curled together. To the left of the hand is a large, bold, black letter 'D'.
- Be direct and kind in communicating the need for compliance.
- If being direct doesn't seem to work, and you know a family member or friend might be better able to gain compliance, consider asking them to assist you with the situation.
- Use understanding and kindness to diffuse someone who is confrontational or combative.

Sample Messages for Friendly Correction

- "Please help us create a culture of respect and care for one another by wearing a mask."
- "I see you enjoying time with your friends. What fun! But I need to remind you to help us keep our social distance space of at least six feet."
- "I understand you don't *want* to wear a mask. The state / health department / CDC / and presbytery all us to all wear masks. If you are unwilling or unable to wear a mask, unfortunately, we need you to wait to come into the building/event until you are able and willing to wear a mask."
- "I want to welcome you to worship, but if you're not ready to follow our protocols today, it won't work for you to be in the sanctuary/event space. Here's a card with information for how you can participate from your car using a mobile phone, or from your computer at home. The service is recorded, so you can drive home and watch it in comfort there." (Note: for persons do not have technology, at least one of our churches is considering having tablets set up for the

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live-stream, which can be loaned for the worship hour, and used in a car, then collected and sanitized.)

- “It is great to be back together with good friends. We love having you here! I can’t wait until we are allowed to shake hands (or give a hug), but for now let’s just (wave, put hand on heart, make peace sign, jazz hands, or bump elbows, etc.) from six feet.”
- “I agree you probably are not at risk, but by wearing masks, we protect all of us, from those of us who may be carrying the virus and not even know it.”
- “I know it is hard to hear that we can’t welcome you into the sanctuary today if you don’t put on a mask, but this is what we agreed to do and the state / health department, etc. requires us to follow through or we won’t be able to meet in person.”
- “You are right in your old same spot, but this pew is blocked off. Can you please find a different seat that will help us to keep a distance of six feet from others, or do you want me to help you find one?”
- If someone has entered with a mask, but has removed the mask or is ignoring social distancing, train people who are kind (even jovial) but firm to approach those who are not complying. Call them away from others, to speak in private, and remind them that our church is required to have mask wearing and social distancing in order to engage in-person. “We want to be able to continue to meet in person, so we need to ask you to do this to help us with this goal.”
- “I know you’ve probably washed your hands a million times in your lifetime, but it’s what you do right now that matters today. Of course, you could put on a pair of gloves I have here.”
- “It looks like your six feet and my six feet are different. I’m going to take a step back.”
- “Make my day. Put on a mask and smile with your eyes.”
- “I really like that you two are wearing masks, but you may be standing closer than six feet apart. Can you please help us model this kind of care for others?”
- “We know you want to sing with the hymns. God and others enjoy hearing your joyful voice. It’s hard to tell you that we need you to hold back on doing this, but knowing the risks involved with singing, others may be very uncomfortable with having anyone sing in the same room with them. We want to enjoy instrumental music, and need everyone’s cooperation to do that. How else can you praise God without singing?”
- “It appears you are not feeling well. I am sorry, but for the health of others we need to make sure you are away from others. Are you able to get home on your own?”
- “I know that others may have similar perspectives, but we have established this protocol to keep all of us safe. We all agreed to this protocol, and for it to work, everyone needs to follow it. If we can’t create a safe environment, we may not be able to be together.”

When Friendly Correction Doesn’t Work?

- In the event someone refuses to comply and won’t self-select out of participating, then consider two options and prepare to execute them: 1) Escort them away from the engagement. And be



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sure to authorize who the “escorters/bouncers” will be for each event; or 2) cancel the event for all because it is unsafe due to non-compliance.

- Prepare for this eventuality with church leaders in your written plans to ensure compliance. Sessions/leadership teams discuss together in advance and agree under what circumstances, a situation of non-compliance might end up with needing to take one of those actions. Include these scenarios in your training and preparation.
- Include these potential actions in your advance communication about expectations.

Strategies for Member/Participant Compliance



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SAMPLE COVENANT #1

A Covenant of Care During COVID-19

The community of faith of _____ Presbyterian Church invites all who enter this building or return to meet in person to join in a covenant of care for one another in order to demonstrate our love of God and neighbor and care especially for those who are most vulnerable to COVID-19. These are the core practices we affirm to reduce known risks of COVID-19 virus transmission as we re-enter our building and engage in-person activities. We ask for your commitment to join in this effort. Please sign below if you agree.

I covenant to help reduce disease transmission by:

Compassionate Distancing

- Staying at home if I am sick (or have been with someone who has symptoms of sickness.)
- Wearing a mask at all times (when gathering with our church community indoors, outdoors, in the church building, or in member homes.)
- Keeping six feet between myself and others.
- Sitting with my household in designated areas.
- Allowing no more than two people in a bathroom at one time.

Doing Things Differently

- Checking in every time I enter the church building.
- Greeting others without touching them.
- Praising God without singing.
- Agreeing not to share drink or food.
- Keeping children of my household beside me.

Disinfecting

- Washing and sanitizing my hands after checking in to the church building
- Using provided gloves and disinfectant after touching surfaces in bathrooms

I covenant to be patient and respectful of requests made by church leaders for the safety of all. I recognize that some members of this community are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and I want to contribute to a positive environment of care and concern for one another.

Strategies for Member/Participant Compliance



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I agree to the Covenant of Care: _____

Date: _____

SAMPLE COVENANT #2

A Covenant of Care During COVID-19

We, the family of faith at _____ Presbyterian Church, follow the dual commandments to love God and to love our neighbors. Recognizing the deadly impact of the coronavirus, we covenant with each other to show our love for each other, our neighbors, and those most vulnerable to the coronavirus in the continued fight against COVID-19, even as we open our buildings for public worship, learning, mission, and use by other agencies.

- We covenant not to attend any in-person church activities if we are sick or believe we have been exposed to someone who is sick.
- We covenant to wash/disinfect our hands immediately upon entering the church building, using the soap/disinfectant for the time it takes to pray the Lord's Prayer.
- We covenant not to hug or shake hands when we are with others.
- We covenant to remain at least 6 feet apart from people with whom we are not sheltered-at-home.
- We covenant to wear face coverings to protect others in case we are sick but not showing symptoms.
- We covenant to be patient and respectful of requests made by church leaders for the safety of all.

We recognize that some members of our family of faith or visitors are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. If we break any of these covenant agreements even innocently, it can put these beloved members and visitors at risk or force them to exclude themselves from our gatherings. Because we want everyone to be safe and included, we agree to abide by these covenants.