



## *An initiative of The FAMILY LEADER Foundation*

### **Church Ambassador Network Guidelines, Principles, and Recommendations for Churches' COVID Mitigation Efforts**

#### **Introduction**

Governor Reynolds' emergency proclamation limiting religious gatherings to 10 or fewer individuals is set to expire on April 30. Governor Reynolds issued a new proclamation for the State of Iowa that goes into effect Friday, May 1, and continues until May 15.

Recognizing the Constitutional liberties involved, Governor Reynolds' new proclamation lifts the limits on spiritual and religious gatherings **in all 99 counties**.

Freedom comes with responsibility. In her proclamation, Governor Reynolds recognized churches' biblical, as well as constitutional, rights to govern their own affairs. This announcement should come both as a relief and a burden: a relief, that our government in Iowa is properly recognizing the role of the Church; and a burden, that we are now fully responsible for how the Church handles our response. Pastors and elder boards across the state will now have to wrestle with what is best for not only their people, but also their communities, and the Lord's name.

We have provided guidelines, principles, options, and recommendations for you to consider and use as a resource, as you discern what is best for your church.

#### **Guiding Principles**

The following are some of the factors that can be used as you make decisions for your church:

- The safety of your members and the community
- Holy wisdom on fellowship and gatherings
- Our public witness
- The prayerful wisdom of faith leaders
- The particular needs and circumstances of your local congregation
- The latest recommendations/orders from the CDC and governmental authorities

#### **Guidelines for any in-person gatherings:**

1. Follow all guidelines from the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) for church services: <https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/61/covid19/Guidance%20-%20Religious%20Facilities%20and%20Places%20of%20Worship.pdf>
2. Review CDC guidelines for social distancing and quarantining. CDC Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>
3. Thoroughly clean facilities. CDC guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

4. Do not allow sick congregants or anyone from a household with a sick member to enter your church buildings.
5. High risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, should continue to shelter in place.
6. Discourage people from shaking hands, hugging, or otherwise engaging in physical contact.
7. Require everyone to wash their hands before entering your church building.
8. Attendance books should not be passed.
9. Consider not using paper bulletins, or ensure paper bulletins are not re-used.
10. Hymnals should either be wiped down after every service, projectors should be used, or you could assign a hymnal to every household for them to bring to and from church.
11. Have a collection box, rather than passing an offering plate.
12. Use individually-wrapped communion packets.
13. Provide masks for congregants and consider having staff and volunteers wear them as an example.
14. We do not recommend making refreshments available.
15. Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
16. Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
17. Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
18. Follow sanitation and hygiene measures set by the IDPH in guidelines linked above.
19. Apply social distancing guidelines. Facilities should move chairs, block off pews, or designate seating areas to ensure congregants who are not members of the same household sit at least six feet apart.

**Potential Service Options to consider with recommendations:**

1. Normal in-person services with social distancing: Church resumes services to members and puts social distancing guidelines and hygiene practices in place.
  - a. Follow guidelines and requirements for any in-person gatherings listed above.
  - b. Continue to offer online services for members and the community and ask vulnerable members to stay home.

We do not recommend resuming full-capacity services at this time.

2. Reduced-capacity in-person service. Restaurants have been asked to reduce capacity by 50% in select counties. This is a safety measure churches should consider.
  - a. Follow guidelines and requirements for any in-person gatherings listed above.
  - b. Continue to offer online services for members and the community and ask vulnerable members to stay home.
  - c. Reduce the number of people in each service. Consider a 50% reduction guideline set by restaurants.
  - d. Add more services to allow more people to attend reduced-capacity services.

For churches in the 77 counties listed in the Governor's proclamation, we recommend cautiously considering the reduced-capacity option if your church is looking to resume in-person services.

3. Outdoor services: With the weather getting nicer, hosting church services outside is becoming a more viable option that allows churches extra space for social distancing. Many farmers' markets will be resuming with social distancing guidelines in all of the 99 counties.
  - a. Follow guidelines and requirements for any in-person gatherings listed above.
  - b. Continue to offer online services for members and the community and ask vulnerable members to stay home.

We recommend this as an option to consider for churches in all 99 counties that have space available to apply social distancing standards outside. Depending on size of congregation, witness to outsiders is another component to factor in as you consider this option.

4. Drive-in services: Drive-in services have been an option for churches for several weeks, and continue to be a strong option.
  - a. Follow guidelines and requirements for any in-person gatherings listed above.
  - b. Continue to offer online services for members and the community and ask vulnerable members to stay home.
  - c. The Iowa Department of Public Health created guidelines for hosting drive-in services prior to the lifting of limitations on churches. It is an excellent resource to consult as you set up your drive-in service:  
<https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/7/Guidance%20on%20Drive%20In%20Church.pdf>

We recommend this as an option for churches in all 99 counties.

5. Offer online services only. No in-person gatherings.
  - a. For many churches, continuing online services only will be the best option.
  - b. An option for these churches is to search for creative ways to resume small groups. Governor Reynolds still recommends 10-person social gatherings, and some small group connectivity can go a long way.
    - i. Churches now have the freedom to decide what level they believe is a reasonable guideline for in-person small group gatherings.

We recommend churches in the 22 counties with more serious outbreaks to seriously consider this option through May 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Weddings and Funerals**

Governor Reynolds' lift on limitations for spiritual and religious gatherings also includes wedding ceremonies and funerals, since they are considered religious gatherings. Wedding receptions, however, are still limited to 10 individuals. We recommend setting an internal standard capacity limit for wedding ceremonies and funerals, check with your local funeral director before promising or scheduling a funeral, and follow guidelines and requirements for any in-person gatherings listed above.

***Galatians 5:13–14 (CSB): For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself.***