

COVID-19 Reopening Plan FAQ's

Why not wait longer to resume gathering?

Gathering for worship is a biblical priority. We recognize that the Lord allows us to temporarily suspend gathering, but we must plan to return. Just as persecution might temporarily stop the church from gathering, at some point they come up with a plan to mitigate risk and resume meeting (though those meetings might look different, be smaller groups, etc.). The current corona virus is likely to be with us for a long time, and our government officials have laid out a plan to reopen sectors of society with certain safeguards in place. We believe we can abide by those common safeguards and resume gathering (though we know some will need to wait longer before returning to the worship service).

Why wait until June 7th?

Our desire was to honor the Governor's orders. In addition, waiting a couple of weeks allowed us to see how the reopening is affecting the spread of the virus in our community. It also gives us time to gather information and make wise decisions. As Proverbs 19:2 says, "Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way." We desire to gather, and we desire to do it wisely.

What if cases of COVID-19 increase in Leon County once we reopen?

If there is a rapid increase in the number of cases in Leon County (not attributable to a discreet location such as an assisted living facility), we will likely suspend in-person gatherings for a time.

Why will we practice social distancing?

Social distancing is not a natural thing – especially among the body of Christ. However, we believe it is necessary at the present time for three reasons. First, we are honoring our governing officials by doing what they have requested in this area (they are not singling out Christians in this requirement). Second, medical experts believe it is the best way to mitigate the chances of spreading the virus. Third, it is loving towards others because, while it is inconvenient, this practice can protect our vulnerable neighbors and members. It is worth noting that on the survey responses, this practice was the biggest request among the church body. So, if you do not feel it is necessary, think of it as a way of loving others during these unique times.

Why gather if we have to abide by restrictions (like social distancing, assigned seats, and less congregational singing)?

If we can have a gathering, we should. This is true even in the face of danger (in fact there is always risk with everything we do – even eating carries the risk of getting a disease or poison). At the same time, we are called to exercise wisdom and make decisions that do not needlessly add risk. The times we are living in provide a unique set of risks that must be evaluated and responded to.

Our current situation calls for extra precautions which, under other times, might be legalistic. The need for them at this moment, however, puts them in the category of love rather than legalism. To illustrate, think of a situation in which the church was being persecuted. We might add rules to not needlessly

endanger the group as a whole (how we approach the meeting site, how loudly we sing, etc.). We might decide to meet in smaller groups and to meet in different locations. That would be loving and wise, not legalistic. Those same rules, however, in a time with no warrant for them, could be legalistic (an attempt to control others).

Will you continue to offer a live stream of the service?

Yes, we plan to do this indefinitely. This is not the same thing as attending a worship service, but we believe it is spiritually helpful for those who cannot attend.

Should I come to church or Bible study if I have had cold or flu symptoms in the past 14 days?

No. Stay home. Even if the symptoms are mild, the best way to love others is to stay home. You can livestream the service until you are fully recovered.

Why do people need to sign up ahead of time to attend service?

In order to observe social distancing, we must reduce the seating capacity in each room. In order to maximize our use of limited space, we need to know how many households will attend. This allows us to accommodate as many people as we can. Signing up ahead of time is unusual, and perhaps an annoyance, but it is a way to love others.

Why are seats assigned?

Assigning seats allows us to maximize our available space while maintaining social distancing.

What should I do when I arrive?

We ask that you try to arrive by at least 10:30 am so we can get everyone seated prior to 10:45 am.

- If you are in the auditorium, you will enter from the front main doors.
- If you are in the fellowship hall, you will enter from the door between the main building and the annex (the backdoor by the hallway bathrooms). Note, if you are unable to use the stairs, please let us know and we can help you enter another way.
- Please maintain social distancing while waiting in line and fellowshiping.

At each entrance, an usher will be present to seat each family. Please wait on the usher so that they can help you get seated and ensure everyone can fit in the room.

Why will each family / person be ushered to a seat?

Since we are assigning seats, our ushers will know where each person needs to go.

Why will congregational singing be scaled back?

As Christians, we love to sing to God and one another and believe that signing is a biblical component of Christian worship (Col 3:16, Psalms). It is possible that singing for a long time and/or in a smaller room can make it more likely to spread the virus. We believe we can enjoy singing and mitigate risk at the

same time by practicing social distancing, meeting in large rooms, and limiting the amount of time spent singing. So, our plan is to sing together but to limit the amount of singing (probably to four congregational songs).

Are masks required?

The Leon County Commission enacted an ordinance that went into effect on June 25, 2020 which requires the use of masks inside the public areas of buildings. This ordinance specifically applies to church buildings and indoor events. Therefore, those attending a service or Bible study will need to wear a mask unless he or she qualifies for one of the following exemptions:

- Persons under the age of six years;
- Persons who have trouble breathing due to a chronic pre-existing condition or individuals with a documented or demonstrable medical problem. It is the intent of this provision that those individuals who cannot tolerate a facial covering for a medical, sensory, or any other condition which makes it difficult for them to utilize a facial covering and function in public are not required to wear one.

Will we require masks once the mask ordinance is repealed?

Probably not. We will encourage those who desire to wear a mask to do so. According to the CDC, "Face coverings are most essential when social distancing is difficult."¹ We decided not to require them because: (1) we are planning for social distancing, (2) it is physically hard for some to sit with a mask on for an hour. By practicing social distancing and not allowing those with cold symptoms to attend, the need for masks is decreased. We understand that some might not feel comfortable returning at this stage without a mask requirement. If that is you, we understand your decision and look forward to you returning when things progress more.

Will we pass an offering plate?

No, we will not resume this until phase two or even later. We encourage you to mail checks (425 McDaniel Street, Tallahassee, FL 32303) or to give online (gcot.org/giving). We will provide offering plates near the exit of each room for those who want to give in person.

Will we practice communion?

Not until phase two. At that point we will carefully consider our method of doing communion (e.g., we will probably not pass the elements around).

How long will the service last?

About 60 minutes.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Forganizations%2Fguidance-community-faith-organizations.html

How will we dismiss so that the aisles aren't clogged with people in close proximity?

By restricting those in the auditorium and fellowship hall, there will be less congestion. When we dismiss a pastor will remind people to social distance, to not clog the aisles, and to be mindful of those who are trying to exit by leaving space for them to get by.

Can we fellowship and talk with others?

Absolutely. You can chat with those seated around you (they will all be at least 6 feet away), and you can chat with others outside before and after the service. Please respect the social distancing requirement.

Will there be coffee?

No, we will not provide coffee. If you are seated in the fellowship hall, you can bring your own (we still ask for no coffee in the auditorium or other carpeted areas).

Will the water fountains or water cooler be running?

No. You can bring your own water bottle with you though.

Will we use hymnals?

No, all lyrics will be on the screen.

Will you hand out bulletins?

No. We will continue to rely on our weekly email and verbal announcements to communicate announcements.

What is the plan for sanitizing?

We will plan to have the security team disinfect all "high-touch" areas before each service. The best protection for each person is avoid touching their face and to wash their hands before and after church.

Will you offer hand sanitizer?

We plan to have handsanitizer available at each entrance, and we strongly encourage everyone to use it upon entering and leaving.

What restrooms will be available?

We will encourage those in the auditorium to use the foyer restrooms and those in the fellowship hall to use the hallway restrooms (though observing social distancing will be difficult there – so be mindful of others).

Can I help with the logistics?

If you are a member of GCOT, we'd love to have you help with our security team (Mark@gcot.org), ushering team (Keith@gcot.org), or media team (larry@gcot.org).

Could I get the virus by attending a worship service?

Yes, that is a possibility. We live in a fallen world, which means that risk is always present. Even driving to church contains some level of risk. The wise avoid foolish risk (and what is foolish regarding health will vary based on your situation). Our desire is to take precautions and communicate those plans to those attending so that they can determine when it is wise for them to return.

What happens if I test positive for COVID-19 after attending GCOT?

Immediately inform one of the pastors so that we can inform those who were present that they may have been exposed. This will help keep others from unknowingly spreading the virus to others who might be exceptionally vulnerable. This is another way to love others above self.

When will the children's ministry and nursery resume in-person ministry?

This is part of the second phase of our plan (which is tied to the last phase of the Governor's "Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step" plan - phase 3). We are not sure when we will enter that phase.

What options are there for families with younger children?

Families can attend, but children will need to be kept in the family's assigned area. Currently, there is a section in the Fellowship Hall with round tables set up. This is a great place for those with young children to sit (it allows you to hem your kids in at a table and gives them a place for drawing etc.). Another option is for each parent to take turns coming to the in-person service. Dad could come one week, and mom could come the following week. Also, we plan to continue the online Sunday school class for elementary students. Email Doug@gcot.org if you have additional questions.