

Genesis Church Relaunching Services Summary Sheet

July 1, 2020

Remember: These are the principles that **MUST** guide our moving forward:

- *MISSION must guide.
- *NURTURE NEW FRUIT.
- *TAKE NEW TERRITORY.
- *PROTECT THE VULNERABLE.
- *STEWARD RESOURCES, including pastors and pastoral staff. *We must move forward in ways that are sustainable for pastors and staff.*

*Rather than “reopening” we have an opportunity to **RELAUNCH** in this new territory. Don’t miss the opportunity. It will only come once in our lifetime.*

Below are both recommendations and requirements. Recommendations come out of what we believe is best for MOST, but not all, churches. Local leadership must wrestle with what locally will best “go and make disciples” in this next season. **If a pastor and local board conclude something other than what is recommended, approval must be received from the superintendent before moving forward. In addition, call or email the superintendent to talk through your plan before relaunching.** As health guidelines change, this document will be updated.

Recommendation:

That churches wait until the fall to “relaunch” regular weekend services. This will allow:

- *time for intentional, missional **planning** in light of new realities
- ***reconnecting in smaller groups**, strengthening our **discipleship systems**. (Churches are encouraged to be resourcing and launching new summer small groups, for those anxious to gather).
- *time to **check that current and future programs serve our Kingdom mission**
- ***exhausted pastors to get some time off**
- *time to **launch outreach** in new, smaller ways, relationally driven rather than event driven.

Requirements:

- *We understand that people have varying feelings about relaunching. We extend love and grace to all.
- *We will follow local, regional, state & federal guidelines, believing that they are intended for good. In NY and PA, re-opening phases are now determined by regional (not county) metrics. Know your region. See Phase requirements below.
- *As churches “re-gather” ALL people must feel free to choose for themselves how they will engage. Some will gather. Others will remain virtually connected. Either is good, and must be allowed.
- *Online opportunities to connect remain vital.
- *We ask all those in the “vulnerable” categories to take special care to protect themselves, and wait to return until a later time. (As of today, vulnerable categories include: those with asthma, kidney disease, chronic lung disease, hemoglobin disorders, immunocompromised (including those in cancer treatment), liver disease, those 65 years and older, those with heart conditions, and those who are severely obese).
- *We ask that anyone not feeling well choose to stay home.

*Once allowed, all public services must have space to welcome visitors within distancing guidelines. (We do not hold services only for members).

*We ask that, out of concern for others, all wear masks (except children under 2 and those with breathing difficulties) while entering, exiting, moving around the building, or singing (masks may be removed while seated and not singing).

*Pastors and leaders must read through the state & CDC reopening guidelines (3 links below) in order to have plans in place with best practices.

*To “relaunch” services, the pastor must get approval from the superintendent. (Call)

Requirements as you follow your regional guidelines for your “phase”...

PHASE 1:

Gatherings allowed in Phase 1:

**Private gatherings of 10 or less people*

****Small groups of 10 or less***

****Small outdoor gatherings with strict social distancing maintained.***

****Drive-in church***

PHASES 2 & 3:

Churches in Phase 2 & 3, now have 50% capacity allowed (whatever % is currently allowed for retail), as long as social distancing can be maintained. This is due to a ruling by the court:

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/judge-blocks-25-capacity-rule-religious-services-ny-71480425>

Practices in place:

***Hand sanitizer** required as people enter the building.

*Regular **cleaning and disinfecting** of the building / bathroom according to CDC & state guidelines.

*Temporary **removal of shared** books or screens (hymnals, pencils, pew bibles, touch screens).

***Strict social distancing** to be adhered to (including in bathrooms, lobby, offices), with the exception of family members who live together. Any seating must be separated at least by 6 feet.

***No food or coffee stations.**

***“Maintain a continuous log** of every person, including workers and visitors, who may have close contact with other individuals at the gathering site or area; excluding deliveries that are performed with appropriate PPE or through contactless means. *The log is **not** required to maintain a list of attendees.”* If one of them contracts COVID19, health officials must be notified immediately. Also for those people: “Implement **mandatory health screening assessment** (e.g. questionnaire, temperature check) for employees, faith leaders, and volunteers, asking about (1) COVID-19 symptoms in past 14 days, (2) positive COVID-19 test in past 14 days, and/or (3) close contact with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case in past 14 days. Responses must be reviewed daily and documented.” See NY guidelines for faith communities for next steps.

***Post safety plans on site.**

***Masks are required while moving around and singing.** In addition to this being a state requirement, this tangibly demonstrates care for others. Have a separate mic for each person who needs it, or disinfect before passing.

***Children remain with parents.**

*Offering in a box or basket at the back of the church. No plates passed.

*No programs passed out OR programs placed on seats ahead of time by masked and gloved individuals.

*Gathering areas (lobby, fellowship hall) closed or used as hallway space where people cannot gather. (Have a one way traffic flow, with separate entrances and exits).

*No communion elements passed or shared. (Individual and sealed communion cups distributed on chairs is an option, but these must be put on the table by an individual with mask & gloves. See:

<https://www.cokesbury.com/081407011585-fellowship-cup-communion-wafer-juice-100-pack> for purchase of these).

*Greeters must remain socially distanced and masked.

*Doors remain open (rather than everyone touching the door), for any room being used OR a gloved, masked individual opens the door for all.

*Bathrooms to be monitored so that only one person is allowed in at a time, and cleaning is done on a regular basis.

Gatherings allowed:

*Number allowed to gather for worship: up to 50% of your worship / space capacity with strict social distancing.

*Small groups of 10 or less where social distancing is kept.

*Outdoor gatherings where social distancing is maintained.

Practices in place for outside gatherings:

NOTE: there is no clarity for this, so for now we will use the 150 limit placed on high school graduations:

*Masks to be worn except when seated & not singing

*6' distances to be marked in some way.

*Plans for bathroom use in line with the above.

*Plans for arrival and dismissal must be made in order to maintain social distancing.

PHASE 4:

At this time, same as above. We assume that there will be a "Phase 5" or "back to normal" once a vaccine is in place.

Resources:

New York Reopening Guidelines for Communities

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReligiousandFuneralServicesSummaryGuidance.pdf>

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReligiousandFuneralServicesMasterGuidance.pdf>

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/judge-blocks-25-capacity-rule-religious-services-ny-71480425>

CDC guidelines for faith communities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>

FMC Guidelines from the Board of Bishops: <https://fmcusa.org/covid19> (link and attached below)

From the Board of Bishops:

Board of Bishops Statement in response to the address of President Donald Trump on May 22, 2020

Greetings Free Methodist Family,

Yesterday, May 22nd, President Donald Trump issued a national declaration acknowledging the essential nature of churches in our communities and calling on all state governors to allow churches to open immediately. It is always encouraging to hear governmental leaders reflect the values we hold so dear. However, while bold proclamations serve to stir people to action, let us first be a people who are committed to love and wisdom before we consider regathering.

In our previous Board of Bishop's directive, we empowered each Superintendent(s) to make re-opening decisions based on the unique situations in our 25 Annual Conferences. We would reiterate that directive and ask that *local churches not consider meeting in person until receiving permission from and observing all stipulations from your Superintendent(s).*

Our conference superintendents are providing outstanding leadership and we are grateful for them. They are collectively guiding us to act in love and wisdom and recentering us on what is most essential and central to our ministry as the church.

Richard Hammer, church law expert and attorney, provides this stark reminder, "I recommend that any church that is considering reopening review an article from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). It describes a case in Arkansas in which 2 symptomatic attendees at a church event infected 35 of the 92 persons in attendance (3 of whom died)." (the full article:

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6920e2.htm?s_cid=mm6920e2_w&fbclid=IwAR1F0tURzgZeYSYp5bOyQTunl0qJUxugABvhpL2VOS80IYDRqRkMnhX4aCg).

Our mission, to Love God, Love People, and Make Disciples is not, nor has it been, compromised during this season of physical distancing. We will continue to be essential even as we live out our mission house to house, in our communities, and through our collective service for Jesus' sake.

One important clarification, our churches are not closed. The church of Jesus is alive and well. The church is actively caring for those in their congregations and communities in numerous ways and continue to gather via digital and other means. We are the church actively bringing the love of Jesus in every context where we are located. Know that we are praying for each of you even as you are holding the tension between calling people to gather and leading through the unknown. May God give you strength for the work you are doing and the grace to bear the weight of responsibility that falls to each of you in times like these.

In Christ,

Linda Adams, Keith Cowart, & Matt Whitehead

The Board of Bishops, Free Methodist Church – USA

Planning Re-engagement of Public Gatherings - 4/30/2020

Free Methodist Family,

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus! As governmental agencies consider gradually walking back physical distancing measures in place to limit the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to offer some guidance for our congregations, camps, ministries, and members as we enter the next phase of managing our present realities:

Lead with Love. The Love of God should define us and our actions in this historic moment. Our love for each other and for those in the world around us will be what causes us to stand out in this time and point others to Jesus (John 13:35 & 3:16 and Romans 12:9-11). Emotions are running high as we all tire of the losses we are experiencing. People are watching how the church will respond under the pressure of these times and we will be judged by the love and generosity evident in our actions. Words alone will not be sufficient, but deeds that demonstrate the love of Jesus will speak powerfully. This is a moment for warm hearts and cool heads as we consider the best path forward. We all wish things could return to “normal”, but this pandemic has fundamentally shifted our culture and continues to do so in ways we don’t yet understand. Looking back, we will all be experts on the change, but right now, not so much. We need to lead with love and show extra wisdom and grace proceeding with caution and praying that the Lord will help us to all be humble, gracious, respectful and kind in our responses and positions we take during this crisis. Let’s lead with love and put the interests of others before our own (Romans 12:9-11) showing them the love of Jesus. We all want to get back to regular in-person meetings, but depending on our context, we may need to lay that need down for the health and safety of our neighbors and the more vulnerable among us.

Take Thoughtful Steps Forward. We all wish we could have definitive answers and a set timeline guide as we enter this new season of response. However, there is no way to establish a specific universal process as the context varies widely in each of our settings, so each congregation, camp, or ministry will need to develop a plan in close cooperation with their conference. These are the things we can provide direction on for all our Free Methodist Family:

1) **Superintendents will provide the leadership for their conferences** regarding the specific timelines and conditions for the resumption of gatherings and use of church buildings in the coming season. In all cases, they will follow or exceed local and state government restrictions. These could vary widely even within states or conferences and elders are advised to follow the leadership of their superintendents. In some cases, it may be legal to gather, but not wise to do so given the moral, financial, or legal risks associated with doing so. Pressure may come from church members or even elders to commence gatherings or open church building prematurely. Follow your superintendent’s lead whether or not you fully agree and remind people that Jesus regularly modeled laying down his own interests for the sake of others and we should do the same.

2) Pastors and local church leaders are encouraged to **engage in a thorough and thoughtful process of planning and preparation** to:

- a. Design and evaluate missional advances and ministry opportunities in your community. The current limitations do not hinder our ability to be effective in the mission. Be prayerfully creative, look at what resources you have, and redesign ministry approaches for the current realities. We can be effective and see significant kingdom growth even in the midst of this trial, if we listen to the Holy Spirit and adjust our methods for the season at hand.
- b. Access resources to help you think through specifics and that challenge your thinking. There are many good resources available. Superintendents can point you to recommended sources for your context. Here are some

resources to get you started: we recommend the article we shared last week which provides questions to consider, this guide created by a local church, and this article by Ed Stetzer as a place to start your process.

c. Be generous with your encouragement, love, prayers, ideas, and resources. Live by faith, not in fear, and see what God will do with the seed of generosity you sow; and

d. Prepare for the long haul. This recovery will occur in phases over time. Don't press pause and wait for things to return to "normal." Make disciples, adjust your model, use every tool at your disposal to advance the kingdom, do justice, and serve the poor and vulnerable among us. As we do, the kingdom will advance, and we will be better positioned on the other side of this; and

e. Consider ways to protect the interests of the vulnerable in your community and by reducing the legal, health, and liability risks in your planning and preparations. Be judicious in the intentional application of public safety protocols combined with an acute awareness of public scrutiny as you begin to reopen your building or hold gatherings. Some churches became hot spots for the initial outbreaks of the virus in the US with devastating consequences. Churches who do not consider the full ramifications of decisions could be responsible for the dreaded "second wave" of infections. Please lead with love and use caution.

Respond Personally in Mission. Jesus is asking all of us to respond in this moment as ambassadors of Christ, as member of his body, and as his presence in the earth. We can't just respond in abstract or organizationally. Each member or elder in the Free Methodist family must take personal action in obedience to Jesus as he is calling you to respond to this crisis. Brian Schiller, in his recent article, encouraged readers to think about how they can take selfless, Christ-like action in this time. We adapted his three questions for your consideration:

1. How does my calendar or to-do list include helping others?
2. This month, what of my personal income is designated for others above and beyond what I have done in the past? Am I considering my neighbors, the poor, and the global church?
3. In prayer, what inclusions do I have beyond family, friends, and church? Who am I praying for to become followers of Jesus?

Be Encouraged. Even though our church buildings need to be reopened, the church is alive and well. We have been deployed. Our mission is not merely gatherings, it is loving God, loving people, and making disciples. While large in-person gatherings are wonderful and important to our collective identity in Christ, they are not essential. We can gather virtually, in smaller groups as allowed, even if restricted to family groups, and we will know that where two or three are gathered, Jesus is present. We can accomplish the mission even under our current limitations.

Let's not focus on what we lack, but on what we have been given. Just as in the story of the feeding of the five thousand, what we have been given might not look like much, but it is more than enough with Jesus to meet the need. Let's trust Jesus with what we have and go for it! The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church and the current restrictions can't prevent the spread of the gospel in discipleship or in acts of love. If large gatherings do not resume for some time, we can still thrive in the mission of Jesus and witness exponential growth.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16: 33 NIV

In closing, let us share with you how proud we are by the responses of the leaders and people called Free Methodists during this pandemic. Reports from all across the country have come to us about the love of Christ being

expressed in tangible ways in these days. The level of focused energy, creativity and innovation has contributed to an exponential increase of ministry in our communities and around the world. Tens of thousands of people across the world have attended online prayer meetings, worship gatherings, Bible studies and discipleship bands. Clearly God is doing a new work among us. Thank you for your faithful and fruitful leadership in these days of opportunity.

Linda J. Adams, D. Keith Cowart, Matthew H. Whitehead

Board of Bishops

4/30/2020

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Articles mentioned in the Bishop's guidelines:

[-https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/what-relaunching-church-might-look-like-over-next-312-month.html](https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/what-relaunching-church-might-look-like-over-next-312-month.html)

[-https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/](https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/)

[-https://injoystewardshipresources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/Lead+Generators/Church+Restart+Plan.xlsx?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=87002338&hsenc=p2ANqtz-ggIEkpH0nDPwrUldkZFMWYXIDwuEhfCfMvbNX6vMicsvFaxDKNxCw0WF3BxB494tIYQp1xI1-XAj8oMp0RM-50ZeldTPyq1GWSmNShr9Zz9m6II&hsmi=87002338](https://injoystewardshipresources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/Lead+Generators/Church+Restart+Plan.xlsx?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=87002338&hsenc=p2ANqtz-ggIEkpH0nDPwrUldkZFMWYXIDwuEhfCfMvbNX6vMicsvFaxDKNxCw0WF3BxB494tIYQp1xI1-XAj8oMp0RM-50ZeldTPyq1GWSmNShr9Zz9m6II&hsmi=87002338)