



## GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITIES OF WORSHIP

Consistent with recommendations from the Governor's Council of Faith-Based Partnerships, communities of worship (CW) should continue to offer online telecommunication tools to conduct services or other operations and are discouraged from congregating in person. This guidance does not account for every scenario. Religious leaders should adapt the principles that underpin this guidance to the rites and ceremonies specific to their religion.

### **If a Community of Worship elects to conduct in-person services, they must abide by the following rules:**

- CWs must post signage at each public entrance which states all of the following:
  - Do not enter if you have a cough, high fever, shortness of breath or if you have been exposed to anyone who has tested positive with COVID-19 in the past fourteen (14) days;
  - Individuals age thirteen (13) and up are required to wear a cloth face covering to enter and remain inside (a cloth face covering is recommended but not required for children ages 2-12);
  - At all times, individuals who are not part of the same household should maximize physical distance from others and remain at least six (6) feet apart – handshaking, hugging, or kissing is discouraged;
  - Proper hand washing and frequent use of hand sanitizer is encouraged.
- COVID-19 continues to pose a serious threat to our community. CWs should encourage all vulnerable individuals, including those at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and those 65 and older, to continue to shelter in place.
- Services must be staggered to allow for a thorough cleaning according to CDC guidelines of any public spaces before the next service begins.
- CWs should control the number of individuals who attend services in order to ensure that safe social distancing is maintained, and shall not exceed more than thirty percent (30%) of stated fire occupancy (excluding staff) during any service.
- CWs should stagger arrival times for congregants, which may include but are not limited to the following methods: alphabetical order of congregants; entry by neighborhoods; permitting those who need assistance or special seating to enter at a designated time prior to the start of the service.

## *In-Person Service Guidance (continued)*

- CWs shall restrict seating (in fixed pews/benches or other seating) to comply with the six (6) feet social distancing requirements, except that members of the same household may sit together. There should be a six (6) foot radius around individual household units – including next to them, in front of them, and behind them. Six (6) feet social distancing should also be maintained between staff and congregants both inside and outside, while seated and standing.
- Signage and physical indicators (e.g. tape, runners, ropes or ribbon) should be used, if necessary, to ensure social distancing rules are followed, with distances measured in six (6) foot increments and marked accordingly at each entrance and throughout the publicly used spaces within the building.
- Children should remain with their parent/guardian at all times.
- While singing during services is permitted, choirs should not be utilized for singing during services. CWs may utilize single singers or duos as long as social distancing of six (6) feet between the singers can be observed and they are able to wear a face covering or face shield. If face coverings or face shields are not available or cannot be used, strategies such as not having the singer directly facing the congregation or increasing the distance between the singer and the congregation should be employed.

## **Cleaning and Sanitizing Requirements**

- Surfaces touched in non-public spaces (offices, hallways and stairwells not used by congregants), such as desks, phones, light switches, and faucets should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily during use.
- All surfaces touched by congregants, including doors, seating, and restrooms, must be disinfected using an EPA-approved disinfectant every 15 minutes to 2 hours.
- Hand sanitizing stations should be supplied at all entrances, including those used by staff only. Hand sanitizer must be composed of at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol.
- Hand sanitizer must be used by CW leaders at frequent intervals during the service, including at a minimum before contact with surfaces that will be touched by others.

## **Cloth Face Coverings**

Cloth face coverings must comply with the Thirteenth Modification of the State of Emergency and must be worn for inside services at all times except where doing so would inhibit an individual's health or under the following limited circumstances:

- CW staff, religious leaders, readers, and singers may address the congregation from a podium or altar, as long as social distancing of six (6) feet between them and the congregation can be observed and they are able to wear a face covering or face shield. If face coverings or face shields are not available or cannot be used, strategies such as having staff, religious leaders, readers, and singers not directly facing the congregation or increasing the distance between them and the congregation should be employed. The speaker or singer must put the face covering back on and use hand sanitizer immediately after speaking or singing.

## *Cloth Face Coverings (continued)*

- No congregants shall remove their cloth face covering during the singing of music.
- Handheld microphones may not be passed between individuals. Sharing microphones is prohibited. All microphones, whether they be self-standing in holders, handheld or lapel style must be sanitized after each use.

## **Exchange of materials of any kind is strongly discouraged**

- To the extent practicable, programs, hymnals, and prayer books for services should be provided in format other than paper – either projected on a wall, and/or offered online for congregants to view from their personal handheld devices. Alternatively, single-use paper documents may be picked up from tables or baskets, but may not be handed out or re-used.
- Use of a stationary collection box, the mail, or electronic methods shall be used instead of passing a collection tray or using ushers to collect contributions.
- No communal receptacles for congregants to bless themselves with holy water may be offered.
- Modify practices that are specific to particular faith traditions that cause close contact. For congregations that practice the sharing of consecrated or blessed food or drink (e.g., Communion, Parshad and others):

### **Preparation of consecrated or blessed food or drink:**

- Those preparing consecrated or blessed food or drink must wear a cloth face covering and gloves. Gloves should be put on after washing hands and replaced anytime they touch a surface other than food or drink items or containers. Preparers must wash their hands prior to beginning, any time they change tasks, or after taking a break and returning to work.
- Gloves should be worn if there will be bare hand contact with food or drink being prepared. Gloves should be put on after washing hands.
- Consecrated or blessed food or drink should be prepared for distribution using single-use articles (i.e. napkin, cups, etc.) or a single container or tray and distributed as prescribed below.
- Consecrated or blessed food or drink and containers should not be touched with bare hands once they are prepared for distribution.

### **Distribution of consecrated or blessed food or drink:**

- Religious leaders and others involved in distribution must wash their hands prior to conducting the service and sanitize their hands prior to distributing consecrated or blessed food or drink.
- Those distributing such consecrated or blessed food or drink must wear a cloth face covering if they will be within six (6) feet of any recipients.

## *Distribution of consecrated or blessed food or drink (continued):*

- Consecrated or blessed food or drink elements should be distributed by single-use articles (i.e. napkin, cups, etc.) provided for recipients to receive materials. Materials may also be placed into a container or on a tray and distributed by a single individual using tongs or other barrier to bare hand to hand contact.
- If consecrated or blessed food or drink is distributed via direct person-to-person contact without gloves or other barrier, the religious leader or lay minister must use hand sanitizer any time he or she believes incidental contact has been made with the communicant.
- Recipients may remove a mask in order to accept consecrated or blessed food or drink only if they are not within six (6) feet of any non-household members.

## **Special Services**

Special services, such as baptisms, initiations, weddings and funerals are permitted if the services can be performed following the guidelines above. The officiant shall use hand sanitizer before beginning the baptism, and before and after anointing the candidate for baptism, and the officiant shall not hold a candidate for baptism. The officiant must wear a mask while within six (6) feet of any other individuals during the ceremony.

- While wedding ceremonies are permissible, wedding receptions are not permissible unless they follow guidelines for other social gatherings provided in the State of Emergency. The officiant must wear a mask while within six (6) feet of any other individuals during the ceremony.
- Youth events, education and support groups should continue through online telecommunication tools as much as possible. In-person youth groups may resume but are limited to 10 participants per group. Multiple groups may run simultaneously so long as social distancing can be maintained. The program coordinator should make hand sanitizer or handwashing stations readily available for all staff and participants. All staff must wear cloth face coverings in accordance with the State of Emergency Order.

## **Drive-in religious services:**

CWs may conduct drive-in services in accordance with the Fifteenth Modification to the State of Emergency which provides that:

- People attending the service must remain in their vehicles at all times and are permitted to open their windows halfway if needed.
- Vehicles attending services may only include immediate family members who live in the same household.
- For any drive-in service, no outdoor seating shall be permitted, including outdoor seating in an open bed of a vehicle.
- Vehicles must remain at least nine (9) feet from each other (including side-to-side while parked).

## *Drive-in religious services (continued):*

- Owners/operators of the property being used for drive-in services shall clearly mark spacing appropriate to identify nine (9) feet between cars.
- No exchange of materials shall take place between congregants and each other or congregants and the providers of the services.
- There must be strict adherence to social distancing guidelines recommended by the CDC and the Division of Public Health.
- Owners/operators shall provide clear signage regarding these requirements.

## **Outdoor religious services:**

CWs may conduct outdoor services so long as all participants are socially distanced and follow all other guidance applicable to the service, including that:

- Individuals and staff must wear cloth face coverings in accordance with the Thirteenth Modification of the State of Emergency.
- Only members of the same household unit may be seated together.
- All individuals must have seats.
- There must be a six (6) foot radius around individual household units.
- Maintain signage and markings to remind and help individuals stand at least six (6) feet apart when in common areas and walkways.

**If you have questions about this guidance, contact the Division of Public Health at 1-866-408-1899 or email [DPHCall@delaware.gov](mailto:DPHCall@delaware.gov).**