SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT PROTECTED AND GUARANTEED BY OUR FEDERAL AND STATE CONSTITUTIONS. WORSHIP IS A KEY PART OF EXERCISING THAT RIGHT. IN MANY FAITH TRADITIONS, IT IS A CORE TENET OF FAITH TO GATHER TOGETHER IN WORSHIP. OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS, CHURCHES, SYNAGOGUES, AND OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES HAVE ADAPTED OTHER MEANS TO WORSHIP, WHETHER HOLDING PARKING LOT SERVICES OR THROUGH TECHNOLOGY. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH AND WORSHIP HAS SHOWN MISSISSIPPI'S RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH AND OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR FAITH.

FROM THE OUTSET OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK THROUGH THE EARLIEST EXECUTIVE ORDERS, I HAVE BEEN CLEAR THAT RELIGIOUS ENTITIES, INCLUDING RELIGIOUS AND FAITH-BASED FACILITIES, ARE ESSENTIAL. I HAVE NOT PROHIBITED FAITH COMMUNITIES FROM ASSEMBLING TO CONDUCT IN-PERSON RELIGIOUS SERVICES WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/TATEREEVES/VIDEOS/543115363274486/?T=174. BUT IN MY FAITH, WE ARE TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES. THE FREEDOM TO WORSHIP SHOULD NOT BE THE FREEDOM TO TRANSMIT COVID-19 TO YOUR NEIGHBOR. SO, DUE TO THE POTENTIAL HIGH RISKS OF WIDESPREAD TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 IN HOUSES OF WORSHIP, I HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH FAITH LEADERS AND ENCOURAGED FAITH COMMUNITIES TO IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP OPTIONS, SUCH AS ONLINE SERVICES AND PARKING LOT SERVICES TO MINIMIZE IN-PERSON GATHERINGS.

WITH THE STRATEGIC, MEASURED REOPENING OF BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE STATE, IT'S TIME TO EVALUATE IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES. THAT DECISION IS SERIOUS AND SHOULD BE MADE BY EACH HOUSE OF WORSHIP AND ITS LEADERSHIP BASED ON THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF ITS FAITH COMMUNITY. FAITH LEADERS SHOULD EVALUATE THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF THEIR CONGREGATION, COMMUNITY, AND FACILITY WHEN DETERMINING WHEN AND HOW TO RESUME IN-PERSON GATHERINGS. THE TOP PRIORITY SHOULD BE PRESERVING AND PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. CARING FOR THE ELDERLY, DISABLED, AND IMMUNOCOMPROMISED IS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES, AND GATHERINGS THAT INCLUDE THESE VULNERABLE POPULATIONS UNIQUELY PUT THEM AT RISK.

AS CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR FAITH LEADERS CONSIDER THE TIME TO BEGIN GATHERING IN-PERSON AGAIN, WE ALL SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT MEETING IN-PERSON NOW WILL BE DIFFERENT THAN BEFORE THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK. AND THOSE CHANGES TO IN-PERSON GATHERINGS WILL NEED TO REMAIN IN PLACE FOR SOME TIME AS WE NAVIGATE THIS PANDEMIC.

MISSISSIPPI IS STRONGER BECAUSE OF OUR FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES. I AM THANKFUL FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THE HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND FAITH COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE PLAYED A LARGE PART IN MISSISSIPPI'S SUCCESSFUL SLOWING OF THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 THROUGH SOCIAL DISTANCING AND OTHER INNOVATIVE MEANS OF WORSHIPING TOGETHER WITHOUT PHYSICALLY GATHERING.

THIS GUIDANCE IS JUST THAT—GUIDELINES. THEY HAVE BEEN COMPILED IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (MSDH) AND ARE OFFERED AS A HELPFUL RESOURCE. THEY ARE CONSIDERATIONS, NOT MANDATES BY THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR, OR ANY OTHER ENTITY OF FEDERAL, STATE, OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

MOVING FORWARD, PEOPLE SHOULD CONTINUE TO EXERCISE CAUTION WHILE COVID-19 REMAINS PRESENT IN MISSISSIPPI. TO MINISTER TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS WHILE ALSO PROTECTING THOSE POPULATIONS AND CONTINUING OUR STATE'S PROGRESS TO CONTAIN COVID-19, FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO CONTINUE OFFERING ONLINE SERVICES AND OTHER CREATIVE METHODS OF WORSHIP AND MINISTRY. FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED TO CONTINUE CONDUCTING AS MANY ACTIVITIES AS POSSIBLE REMOTELY AND FOLLOWING THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS GUIDANCE AS WELL AS THE GUIDANCE FROM THE CDC AND MSDH WHEN DECIDING TO BEGIN GATHERING IN-PERSON ONCE AGAIN.

Governor Tate Reeves

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

PREPARING YOUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP

- WALK YOUR CAMPUS WITH FRESH EYES REGARDING UPKEEP AND CLEANLINESS.
- INVITE MEDICAL AND OTHER HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS TO HELP DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES RELATED TO THE HEALTH OF YOUR CONGREGATION.
- IMPLEMENT CLEANING AND DISINFECTION PRACTICES, ACCORDING TO CDC GUIDELINES: WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-NCOV/COMMUNITY/ORGANIZATIONS/CLEANING-DISINFECTION.HTML.
- SANITIZE SHARED RESOURCES AFTER EACH USE, AND REGULARLY SANITIZE ALL HIGH-TRAFFIC/HIGH-TOUCH AREAS (E.G. RESTROOMS, DOORKNOBS, COUNTERS, MICROPHONES, AND SEATS).
- USE CONTROLLED POINTS OF ENTRY AND EXIT FROM THE SANCTUARY/HOUSE OF WORSHIP TO HELP MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING.
- ENSURE THE FLOW OF FRESH AIR AND THAT VENTILATION SYSTEMS ARE OPERATING PROPERLY. FOR HVAC SYSTEMS, FILTRATION UP TO SARS-COV-2 STANDARDS IS RECOMMENDED. REGULAR AND FREQUENT CLEANING OF HVAC INTAKES AND RETURNS IS RECOMMENDED. IF ELECTRIC FANS ARE USED, AVOID ALLOWING THEM TO BLOW FROM ONE PERSON DIRECTLY ONTO ANOTHER PERSON.
- IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT RESTROOMS BE CLEANED AND SANITIZED DAILY. DISPOSABLE PAPER TOWELS ARE RECOMMENDED, AND AIR DRYERS SHOULD BE DEACTIVATED.
- CONSIDER CLOSING COMMON AREAS OUTSIDE THE SANCTUARY TO DISCOURAGE GROUP GATHERING AND TO ENSURE PROPER SOCIAL DISTANCING.
- MOVE AND LIMIT UNNECESSARY PHYSICAL OBJECTS IN ORDER TO REDUCE POTENTIAL TRANSMISSION OF THE VIRUS.
- GIVE CAREFUL ATTENTION TO PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN'S AREAS. CONSIDER REMOVING NONESSENTIAL ITEMS TO MINIMIZE HIGH CONTACT SURFACES. SANITIZE SURFACE AREAS BETWEEN USE.

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

WORSHIP SERVICES: LOGISTICS, TIMES, & LOCATIONS

- PRIOR TO RESUMING IN-PERSON SERVICES, COMMUNICATE WITH MEMBERS OF YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY (SUCH AS VIA FLYERS, E-MAIL, SOCIAL MEDIA) ABOUT STEPS BEING TAKEN TO PREPARE THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP FOR THEIR ARRIVAL AND WAYS THE IN-PERSON GATHERING WILL BE DIFFERENT. REMIND THEM OF SOCIAL DISTANCING PROTOCOLS.
- CONSULT CDC GUIDELINES AND GUIDANCE FROM THE MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO DETERMINE THE RISKS OF GATHERING IN-PERSON. THIS SHOULD INCLUDE THINKING ABOUT THE PERCENTAGE OF YOUR COMMUNITY CLASSIFIED AS VULNERABLE, HOW CONDUCIVE YOUR FACILITY IS TO ALLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING, THE SIZE OF YOUR COMMUNITY, AND MORE.
- CONSIDER ADOPTING A PHASED APPROACH TO RESUMING IN-PERSON GATHERINGS.
- COMMUNICATE WITH VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND FAMILIES REQUIRING CHILD CARE DURING THE WORSHIP SERVICE TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO DELAY THEIR RETURN FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. KEEP AN ONLINE MEETING OPTION FOR THOSE WHO ARE UNCOMFORTABLE OR UNABLE TO ATTEND YOUR SERVICE IN PERSON FOR ANY REASON.
- CONSIDER HOLDING A SEPARATE WORSHIP SERVICE FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS (EVERYONE 65 YEARS AND OLDER, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, PEOPLE WITH SERIOUS RESPIRATORY OR CARDIOVASCULAR CONDITIONS, PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED, AND OTHERS). BE MINDFUL OF THE DIVERSE HEALTH NEEDS OF OTHER MEMBERS. REMIND PEOPLE WHO ARE SICK OR HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO NOT ATTEND IN-PERSON GATHERINGS AND PARTICIPATE VIRTUALLY INSTEAD.
- CONSIDER SOLUTIONS TO MINIMIZE CLOSE PERSONAL CONTACT THAT MAY BE PART OF YOUR SERVICES, SUCH AS HANDSHAKES OR SHARING FOOD AND DRINK. CONSIDER DELAYING THE RESUMPTION OF CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES/NURSERY PROGRAMS UNTIL A LATER TIME.
- AS THE PHASED APPROACH BEGINS, LIMIT THE SIZE OF ATTENDANCE IN YOUR SANCTUARY AND OTHER CONFINED SPACES TO CREATE SEATING ARRANGEMENTS THAT PROVIDE AT LEAST 6-FOOT DISTANCING BETWEEN HOUSEHOLD UNITS. CONSIDER BROADCASTING THE SERVICE TO OTHER ROOMS IN THE FACILITY TO ALLOW PROPER SOCIAL DISTANCING.

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

WORSHIP SERVICES: LOGISTICS, TIMES, & LOCATIONS (CONT.)

- MITIGATE EXPOSURE BY IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES – STAY AT LEAST 6 FEET FROM PEOPLE NOT IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD, DO NOT HUG OR SHAKE HANDS, AND FOLLOW OTHER CDC GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING: WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-NCOV/PREVENT-GETTING-SICK/SOCIAL-DISTANCING.HTML.
- CONSIDER NOT EXCEEDING 50% OF THE MAXIMUM CAPACITY OF THE SANCTUARY OR HOUSE OF WORSHIP TO FOLLOW MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS THAT EVERYONE ATTENDING SUCH ESSENTIAL EVENTS AND GATHERINGS TAKE EXTRA PRECAUTIONS, INCLUDING MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE: WWW.MSDH.MS.GOV/MSDHSITE/_STATIC/14,21866,420.HTML
- USING CONTROLLED POINTS OF ENTRY AND EXIT FROM THE SANCTUARY/HOUSE OF WORSHIP. ASK YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY TO ENTER THAT FACILITY AND IMMEDIATELY ENTER THE SANCTUARY/HOUSE OF WORSHIP.
- ENCOURAGE MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY TO STAY HOME IF THEY ARE SYMPTOMATIC, HAVE A FEVER, HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS TESTED POSITIVE, OR HAVE TRAVELED INTERNATIONALLY OR TO A DOMESTIC HOT SPOT IN THE PAST 2 WEEKS.
- CONSIDER STRONGLY ENCOURAGING THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS (COVERING NOSE AND MOUTH) BY ALL PERSONS IN THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP. CONSIDER HAVING A SUPPLY OF FACE COVERINGS AVAILABLE AT ENTRANCES TO OFFER TO INDIVIDUALS IF REQUESTED.
- IF YOU LEARN THAT A MEMBER OF YOUR COMMUNITY HAS TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, REPORT THE CASE TO THE MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FOLLOW THEIR GUIDANCE TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY CEASE IN-PERSON GATHERINGS, CLOSE FOR ADDITIONAL CLEANING, OR OTHERWISE CHANGE YOUR PROTOCOLS.
- STAY INFORMED OF THE MOST UPDATED RECOMMENDATIONS AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS FROM THE CDC AND MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH FOR HANDLING COVID-19, AND REEVALUATE YOUR PROCEDURES AS THE COVID-19 SITUATION EVOLVES IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY.

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

- IT IS IMPORTANT THAT LEADERS OF FAITH COMMUNITY STAY INFORMED WITH CURRENT INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19.

- COMMUNICATE TO YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY THE STEPS YOU ARE TAKING TO MAINTAIN CLEAN AND SAFE CONDITIONS IN YOUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP AND DELIVER RELEVANT MINISTRIES SAFELY.

- EXTEND THE GOOD HABITS YOUR COMMUNITY HAS EMBRACED SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, SUCH AS PASTORAL CARE THROUGH SMALL GROUPS AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION, AND LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ADOPT ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES.

- EVALUATE WHICH PRACTICES ARE INAPPROPRIATE TO CONTINUE WHILE COVID-19 REMAINS A THREAT.

- REQUIRE A COVID-19 SYMPTOM AND TEMPERATURE CHECK FOR ALL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THEY BEGIN THEIR SERVICE OR WORK. SCREEN ALL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS FOR COVID-19 SYMPTOMS BEFORE SERVICES WITH THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. ANY STAFF OR VOLUNTEER WHO ANSWERS 'YES' TO ANY QUESTION SHOULD BE ASKED TO RETURN HOME WITHOUT ENCOUNTERING OTHER MEMBERS OF STAFF OR YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY:

    1. HAVE YOU BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19 IN THE PAST 14 DAYS?
    2. ARE YOU EXPERIENCING A COUGH, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, OR SORE THROAT?
    3. HAVE YOU HAD A FEVER IN THE LAST 48 HOURS?
    4. HAVE YOU HAD NEW LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL?
    5. HAVE YOU HAD VOMITING OR DIARRHEA IN THE LAST 24 HOURS?

- TEMPERATURE SCREENING FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS BEFORE SERVICES:
    1. BEST PRACTICE: EMPLOYERS TO TAKE TEMPERATURES ON SITE WITH A NO-TOUCH THERMOMETER EACH DAY UPON ARRIVAL AT WORK.
    2. MINIMUM: TEMPERATURES CAN BE TAKEN BEFORE ARRIVING. NORMAL TEMPERATURE SHOULD NOT EXCEED 100.0° FAHRENHEIT.

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

STAFF AND LEADERSHIP (CONT.)

- CONSIDER REQUIRING ALL STAFF TO WEAR APPROPRIATE PPE BASED ON THEIR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND IN ADHERENCE TO STATE AND LOCAL REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES.
- CONSIDER DESIGNATING A HEALTH OFFICER AND TEAM. THIS TEAM OF INDIVIDUALS WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING AND ESTABLISHING PROTOCOLS TO KEEP YOUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP SAFE. SPECIFICALLY, CONSIDER CREATING A SANITATION PROTOCOL TO BE FOLLOWED BETWEEN SERVICES AND EACH DAY. DAILY CLEANING OF FREQUENTLY TOUCHED SERVICES IS ENCOURAGED.
- DEVELOP A PLAN FOR POTENTIAL COVID-19 CASES, AND WORK WITH LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS WHEN NEEDED (E.G., MONITOR AND TRACE COVID-19 CASES, DEEP CLEAN FACILITIES).
- COMMUNICATE WITH ALL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS SO THEY WILL BE INFORMED AND PREPARED FOR YOUR PLANS, SCHEDULE AND TIMING FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP AND ABOUT YOUR COVID-19 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

WORSHIP PROGRAMMING

- AVOID PASSING A PLATE OR CUP, AND MODIFY DISTRIBUTION PROTOCOLS IF YOUR TRADITION INVOLVES SHARED FOOD OR DRINK.
- TEMPORARILY REPLACE A CHOIR WITH SOLOISTS OR SMALL ENSEMBLES OF INDIVIDUALS AT LEAST 6 FEET APART.
- AVOID SHARING AND PASSING MICROPHONES.
- CREATE OTHER WAYS TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO TITHE WITHOUT PASSING COLLECTION PLATES (E.G. STATIONS, ENCOURAGING ONLINE GIVING).
- DELAY RESTARTING SUNDAY SCHOOL, SABBATH SCHOOL, OR OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONAL CLASSES. WHEN SUCH CLASSES DO RESUME ON PREMISES, CONSIDER REDUCING CLASS SIZES TO MAINTAIN THE SOCIAL DISTANCING.
- CONSIDER DISMISSING IN A PROCESS THAT ENSURES SOCIAL DISTANCING (CERTAIN AREAS EXIT BY CERTAIN DOORS).
- MAKE ANNOUNCEMENTS VERBALLY OR USING SOCIAL MEDIA, EMAIL, OR DIRECT MAIL RATHER THAN PRINTED BULLETINS OR OTHER FLYERS.
- PROVIDE SECURITY AND GREETERS/USHERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FACILITIES. INSTRUCT THEM ON YOUR IN-PERSON WORSHIP POLICIES, INCLUDING GREETING (NO HANDSHAKES OR HUGS AT THIS TIME).
- PROP DOORS OPEN OR HAVE GREETERS/USHERS HOLD DOORS OPEN TO MINIMIZE MULTIPLE CONTACT WITH DOOR HANDLES.
- SANITIZE ALL HIGH-CONTACT SURFACE FREQUENTLY.

SAFE WORSHIP

GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES

AMENITIES

- POST A SIGN AT ALL POINTS OF ENTRY WITH THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REQUESTING THAT ANY PERSON ANSWERING 'YES' TO ANY QUESTION NOT TO ENTER THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP:

    1. HAVE YOU BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19 IN THE PAST 14 DAYS?
    2. ARE YOU EXPERIENCING A COUGH, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, OR SORE THROAT?
    3. HAVE YOU HAD A FEVER IN THE LAST 48 HOURS?
    4. HAVE YOU HAD NEW LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL?
    5. HAVE YOU HAD VOMITING OR DIARRHEA IN THE LAST 24 HOURS?

- POST ADDITIONAL SIGNS AT ALL POINTS OF ENTRY TO REMIND PEOPLE TO PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING AND MAINTAIN GOOD HAND HYGIENE.
- MAKE SURE THERE IS HAND SANITIZER AVAILABLE AT OR NEAR ALL POINTS OF ENTRY TO MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO ACCESS AND USE OFTEN.
- POST SIGNS IN RESTROOMS REGARDING APPROPRIATE HAND-WASHING AND OTHER HYGIENE. MSDH INFORMATION AVAILABLE HERE: WWW.MSDH.MS.GOV/MSDHSITE/_STATIC/RESOURCES/8472.PDF
- WHERE PRACTICAL, ENCOURAGE THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS (COVERING NOSE AND MOUTH) BY PERSONS IN THE WORSHIP FACILITY. CONSIDER HAVING SUPPLY OF FACE COVERINGS AVAILABLE AT ENTRANCES TO OFFER TO INDIVIDUALS IF REQUESTED.
- COFFEE STATIONS SHOULD BE CLOSED. GROUP MEALS ARE STRONGLY DISCOURAGED.
- IF DINING FACILITIES AND/OR SERVICES ARE REOPENED/RESUMED, IN-HOUSE DINING IS SUBJECT TO THE LIMITATIONS IN EXECUTIVE ORDER 1478 REGARDING RESTAURANTS AVAILABLE HERE: GOVERNORREEVES.MS.GOV/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/EXECUTIVE-ORDER-1478-.PDF.
- ACTIVITY CENTERS AND GYMS ARE ENCOURAGED TO REMAIN CLOSED AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, IF SUCH FACILITIES ARE REOPENED, THEY ARE SUBJECT TO THE LIMITATIONS IN EXECUTIVE ORDER 1480 REGARDING GYMS AVAILABLE HERE: GOVERNORREEVES.MS.GOV/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/EXECUTIVE-ORDER-1480-EXTEND-SAFTER-AT-HOME.PDF.