



UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Reopening Church Buildings for Worship and Ministry

GNJ leadership looks forward to working with all our congregations to reopen buildings for ministry and mission. Reopening our buildings will require hard work and challenging decisions. COVID-19 will continue to spread in our communities and will continue to take people's lives. Through May 15, within the GNJ boundaries, more than 150,000 people became sick with COVID-19 and more than 10,000 people died. More than 600 United Methodists of Greater New Jersey have become sick and more than 100 have died. God in Genesis 1-2 calls us to be good stewards of creation, including one another. Your good and thorough work will be a testimony to your discipleship and being a good steward of all God has entrusted to you.

Our Goal

Spread the Good News of Jesus Christ as together we flatten COVID-19 and ensure **zero infections are spread by United Methodist activity.**

When Can Churches Open?

Congregations are **to follow the governor's directives about when and how to open church buildings.** Each congregation is to develop its own policies and guidelines based on your governor's directives as they become available. These policies and guidelines will be modified and adapted over time as the situation changes. Information about reopening can be found for each state here:

- [New Jersey](#)
- [New York](#)
- [Pennsylvania](#)

Developing Your Plan

Each congregation is to have a plan prior to reopening that addresses from car to pew and pew to car. No opening may occur until your governor indicates churches may begin to gather and the church has a plan. Each plan will vary because of the size of the congregation, the building type and ministries carried out. Each plan must be approved by the church council. Areas to address and questions to help congregational leaders develop a plan are shown below. As you have questions about your plan or if you would like it reviewed by GNJ leadership, you may email opening@gnjumc.org.

Information Conference Calls

GNJ will hold conference calls on Thursday May 21 to answer questions and resource church leaders about developing an opening plan.

Thursday, May 21 at 10:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m. ad 7:00 p.m.

All calls can be accessed with the same [Zoom link](#) (Meeting ID: 916 7774 4407) or dial in 1-646-876-9923 (Meeting ID: 916 7774 4407)

8 Essential Health and Safety Areas to Address in Your Plan

- 1 **Gathering Size:** Setting and ensuring capacity limits based on state requirements

- 2 **Social Distance:** Maintaining 6 feet between each person: [See CDC Guidelines](#)

- 3 **Human Contact:** Preventing people from touching objects and people:
[See CDC Guidelines](#)

- 4 **Cleaning:** Cleaning surfaces and all common areas: [See CDC Guidelines.](#)

- 5 **Vulnerable People:** Taking extra precautions with older people, people with asthma, liver disease, hypertension, health conditions and disabilities:
[See CDC Guidelines](#)

- 6 **Protection:** Using masks, gloves and hand sanitizers: [See CDC Guidelines](#)

- 7 **Signage and Teams:** Greeting and guiding people to ensure safety and social distancing

- 8 **Communication:** Communicating and providing continual updates for your plan

Prayer Vigil - A Recommendation

Prior to opening for your first weekend in-person worship service, hold a prayer vigil at the church. Invite the entire congregation to come, individually or in family groups, at 15-minute intervals to pray in the sanctuary. Pray for healing, safety and protection for all who will worship in your church building and all other houses of worship. The prayer vigil will also give you an opportunity to test the plan and procedures for health and safety.

Guiding Questions to Develop Your Plan

Each congregation is to have a plan prior to reopening. **No opening may occur until your governor indicates churches may begin to gather and the church has a plan.** Each plan will vary because of the size of the congregation, the building type and ministries carried out. The following are questions to help congregational leaders develop a plan to be approved by the church council. As you have questions about your plan or if you would like it reviewed by GNJ leadership, you may email opening@gnjumc.org.

Arriving to the Church

- What information will you provide to your congregation by mail or email about the practices and guidelines for those participating in worship, ministries or activities on your property?
- Will people be required to bring their own mask, or will masks be provided?
- How will people park?
- What signage will you post to alert people to social distancing practices?
- How will people enter the facilities so they do not have to touch door handles and other items?
- Where will hand sanitizers be placed?
- How will you encourage people who are at risk, sick or have a cough or fever to stay home?

Worship Experience – RECOMMENDED! Continue online worship services even after your building reopens.

- Will greeters be gloved and masked?
- How will you keep necessary inventory of masks, hand sanitizer, appropriate cleansers?
- Have you prepared scripts for greeters to guide people to worship safely?
- Are you prepared to turn people away or have a planned overflow space if you reach capacity?
- What instructions will you post for ALL people entering the building?
- If singing by the congregations and choirs is prohibited, how will you include music in your service?
- How will you collect the offering, without passing the plate, and use safe practices for counting the collection?
- How will you provide a safe Communion experience?
- Have you removed all items from the pews including hymnals, Bibles, sign-in cards, tissues and pens?
- Can you manage the order of worship without a bulletin handout?
- Are procedures in place to clean and care for those working sound and media technology?
- Have you created a system for microphone use during worship so there is no sharing of equipment?
- How will you monitor and clean bathrooms?

Nursery and Sunday School

- Will you allow children in the service?
- How will you ensure the safety of children and the nursery workers?
- How will you clean the items in the children's area before and after they are used?

Fellowship Activities – RECOMMENDED! No fellowship, food or coffee hours at this time.

- Do you have single-serve creamers and sugars to lessen germ spreading?
- How can you ensure coffee pots and other serving devices are not handled by multiple people?
- What system will you set up to ensure people maintain social distance during fellowship?
- How will you address situations when people do not follow the social-distancing and other public-health guidelines?

Meetings – RECOMMENDED! Meetings continue online and by conference call.

- How will you train or communicate with leaders about safe health protocols?
- Are materials electronic so that you do not have handouts?
- Who will clean bathrooms, doorknobs and other common surfaces before and after the meeting?
- Will you provide masks?

Outside Group Usage

- Have you communicated to ALL groups using your buildings (congregations, day-care centers, 12-step and scouts) required safety and health guidelines for usage? How will you ensure that these requirements are followed?
- Who will be responsible for cleaning before and after the meetings? How will you manage shared usage of kitchen facilities, such as refrigerators and coffee makers?

Office Practices

- How will you protect office staff and provide masks?
- Are work areas properly social distanced?
- How will you adapt cleaning procedures and janitorial services?