

NON-WORSHIP GATHERINGS OF 25 OR LESS

Updated from the Technical Assistance Manual

December 2, 2020

On November 13, 2020, Governor Northam amended [Executive Order 67](#), which among other things, limited the size of in-person gatherings to 25 or less in attendance. While this size restriction does not apply to worship services, it does apply to other aspects of the life of the church with certain very limited exceptions when providing services for low-income people such as food pantries and homeless ministries.

This document is designed by the Conference Mission and Ministry Workgroup to assist Healthy Church Teams (HCT) develop plans for safe gatherings while this Executive Order is in effect. While this document includes both requirements as well as guidelines, it is important to note that once a plan is approved by the District Superintendent, that plan contains requirements that the church must follow.

As a reminder, all those participating in any in-person gathering is required to do the following:

- acknowledge his/her current health is good as part of a health screening in the form required by the local church;
- maintain 6-foot social distancing between all persons (excepting those who are in household groups) at all times;
- properly wear a face covering over his/her nose and mouth; and
- the above requirements apply to all gatherings other than worship services, which have their own requirements found in the [Technical Assistance Manual](#) ("TAM").

In developing a plan for these gatherings, the HCT must apply all the standards below to any in-person gatherings, including the provisions for the five layers of mitigation: **sanitation, distancing, face coverings, health screenings, and ventilation**. The HCT must then submit the plan for in-person gatherings to the District Superintendent for approval.

You will notice that each heading offers a series of questions. While not meant to be an exhaustive list of things to consider, these questions should serve as a guide to the HCT as to the kinds of things for which they should be planning.

Sanitation

Questions to consider: Who will be responsible for sanitizing the space in which this event occurs (including restrooms)? What products will be used? Can the participants in this event share the duties of sanitizing after the event has ended? Can you use technology to avoid sharing paper? How will you encourage participants to bring their own materials with them (Bibles, books, etc.)?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [has provided guidance](#) for cleaning and disinfecting public spaces like churches. This document can assist in developing a sanitation plan for the HCT to use.

Distancing

Questions to consider: How will you determine the capacity of the space in which the event takes place while still allowing for six-foot social distancing (except for people who live in the same household)? If you are using a classroom, can any tables be removed to allow for more distancing? What is the largest space in which the event can take place? How can distancing be maintained in hallways or as people enter and exit the building? Which doors will be people use? How will situations where people do not/will not distance be handled? Who will be responsible for this? How can this information be communicated to participants?

Face Coverings

Information regarding the efficacy of face coverings is available from the [Association of American Medical Colleges \(AAMC\)](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Questions to consider: How will we ensure that participants wear face coverings at all times and wear them correctly while on the premises? Will we have face coverings to share? If so, how will you reliably procure these face coverings? How will you manage a situation where someone refuses to wear a face covering or [wears the face covering improperly](#)? Who will be responsible for enforcing this requirement? How will this requirement be communicated?

Health Screenings

All groups using the building must use one of the following forms of health acknowledgement. However they receive the health acknowledgement, (forms or entryway register), these health acknowledgement records will be given to the church for storage by the local clergy. Groups with a special concern for anonymity (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, etc.) may put the records in a sealed envelope with the understanding that the local clergy will review them solely in the event of positive COVID-19 result so the proper contact tracing and other safety issues can be resolved.

Every person should review their own health using the Health Acknowledgment Form before attending any church gathering. One of the following two methods of health acknowledgement must be used for every in-person gathering, with the exception of drive-in worship.

1) Health Forms on line. We have developed a fillable Health Acknowledgement Form that anyone can complete online on the [Conference website](#). After the form is completed, the form goes directly to your local clergy. If you need to complete the Health Acknowledgement Form manually, you can download it and print it and send it to the church. You can download the form from the Conference website at <https://vaumc.org/return>. If you are not able to complete the form online, call your local church clergy and complete the form over the telephone. A verbal acknowledgement will be noted by the clergy for those that can only complete this over the telephone.

2) Entryway Health Acknowledgement. An entryway version of the Health Acknowledgement Form can be found at www.vaumc.org/return. Churches may print

the form in poster-size and post it at the entryways used for each in-person gathering. Persons entering must read the form, acknowledge that they can affirm 'yes' to all of the statements on it to a volunteer posted at the door, and provide their name and contact information, which the volunteer will record and the church will keep. HCTs will need to develop a plan for keeping persons socially distanced during this entry process. Persons who cannot affirm 'yes' to all the statements on the form will not be able to enter.

Questions to consider: How will you do temperature checks for participants? How can you receive necessary information for contact tracing while maintaining six feet of social distancing? How will this contact information be stored? Who will be responsible for collecting it? Will you collect health screening information at the church or using the [online form](#)? How will you handle a situation where someone refuses to provide contact information? Who will handle this?

Ventilation

Questions to consider: Since longer events increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19, how long will this event last? How can you keep this event to the shortest possible length? Can this event be done virtually instead of in person? How can the [HVAC system be adjusted](#) so that it utilizes the [ventilation recommendations](#) provided by the Conference? Can windows be opened and/or ceiling fans used to help circulate air?

Additional Information

Food

Meals can be prepared for off-site consumption as long as churches comply with the requirements in this document and [food safety guidelines provided by the Virginia Department of Health](#) and the [Conference](#).

Churches are encouraged to contact the local Health Department to become certified. Meals should not be prepared in homes and brought to the church for this purpose. Any plans for meal preparations must be included in Healthy Church Team plans and approved by the District Superintendent.

Food may not be consumed at any church events/activities at this time, with the exception of DS-approved ministries which serve the homeless.