

## **PRG Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

Edited 5/28/2021

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

#### **What does PRG mean?**

PRG stands for Post-COVID Re-Entry Group, in short PRG. 'Post' pandemic suggests that it's all over and we can go back to the status quo. However, we are still in a pandemic and will be impacted by this in a variety of ways for a long time. We are aware that we cannot declare an end to the pandemic, and believe that we need to continue our effort to be vigilant. At the same time, we believe that our churches are at the critical juncture to prepare for the Post-COVID era. As we ask for the churches to continue their deliberations in setting the safety guidelines for its ministries, we ask the churches to use this time to rethink and prepare to relaunch ministries in this new-normal. We are here to make 'Progress (PRG)' and will commit to support the efforts of the churches.

#### **Are you asking us to form a new team?**

The answer is 'yes' and 'no.' We do want to relieve the committed members of the HCT, as we appreciate their hard work. We suggest that the church invites 2-3 members of the HCT to be part of the PRG team, so there is continuity and safety measures can continue. We ask the pastor, in consultation with the lay leader, to recruit key leaders of the church to envision and plan for the future of the church. The pandemic has brought us challenges, proving just how resilient and adaptable our churches can be. Now is the time to envision new dreams and ministry plans on a new blank sheet of paper. We strongly encourage each church to be progress-oriented and dream of new ways to engage, instead of recoiling back to March, 2020. We recommend a member of the Trustees be part of PRG, as they can bring knowledge of responsibilities pertaining to the church facilities.

#### **I'm in a small church and are you asking me to form a new team?**

We understand that forming a new team can be difficult. We do acknowledge that it may be the best option for a church administrative council to serve as the PRG team. Remember to include former HCT members and people who can bring new voices and thoughts to the table.

#### **What is the difference between HCT and PRG?**

PRG teams will continue to plan and execute safety measures for the churches. However, we ask that the churches will soon adapt their conversations to reflect, rethink, and reshape their vision to effectively provide ministry in the Post-COVID era. If the church did not have a clear vision, this will be a time to develop a vision, which is aligned to the Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church, 'Making Disciples of Jesus Christ, for the Transformation of the World' and the vision of the Virginia Annual Conference 'to be disciples of Jesus Christ, who are Lifelong Learner, who Influence others to Serve.'

### **What does this newly-shared May 28 date mean for previously stated July 1 local church decision-making?**

According to the new announcement from the Governor, and Executive Order 79 being in effect on May 28th, the decision-making process will change. The date we announced to transition from Approval to Review is to take effect on May 28th. The May 15 announcement from the Conference allowed churches to make immediate changes without District Superintendent notification or approval. Churches should communicate any of those pre-approved steps that they are taking to their District Superintendent as soon as possible, and begin using the M.A.P. and their PRGs to move beyond those steps or initiate new plans after May 28, 2021.

## **FORMING PRG**

### **Why does a church need a PRG team?**

The purpose of the PRG team is twofold. First, the PRG will continue the conversation about safety guidelines for the local church while closely monitoring any changes in the number of emerging cases in their locality. That is why we ask at least 2-3 HCT members to continue to serve on the PRG team. The other important purpose is to help the church 'Rethink & Reshape' its ministry. We envision that each PRG team will function as a thinktank for the church leadership. That is why we ask certain council members to be involved in PRG, but more importantly young and new members to join to help the church to 'Rethink & Reshape.' We understand that some churches will use the church council to work as their PRG. We strongly recommend that the council add new voices, as voting members, in crafting the plan for Relaunch!

### **Who nominates PRG?**

The Pastor of the local church, as the chairperson of the Nomination committee (§ 258.1) shall nominate the PRG members in consultation with the lay leader, as the vice-chair of Nomination. Through consultation the PRG chair should be appointed by

the pastor and lay leader, and pastor and lay leader are not advised to function as PRG chair.

## **APPROVAL PROCESS**

### **What is the difference between DS Review vs DS approval?**

Until May 28, churches will need approval from their DS to advertise and execute any changes in their ministry plan. According to our guidelines, churches need to submit a plan 14 days prior to the ministry event date or start of a new change. After the submission of the plan, churches are to wait till they receive an approval from their District Superintendent.

Starting on May 28, we ask the churches to submit a plan to their DS for review two weeks prior to its implementation. Once the plan is submitted, churches can start the advertisement and execution of the plan without waiting to hear back from the DS. Remember, however, that the DS has the ability to provide guidelines, suggestions, or requirements in order for events to proceed. If the DS sees a huge deviance from mitigation and safety measures, they have the prerogative to send the plan back to make appropriate changes.

### **Who writes the plan, according to the revised TAM, for after May 28?**

Responding to the change of the Governor's order, we asked churches to activate local church PRG teams. The PRG is to work as a task force for the church council to recommend new safety guidelines for the church. We understand the timeline for writing and implementing plans for each church will be different. We acknowledge that churches may decide to ask their current HCT groups to continue serving as their PRG moving forward. However, we want to encourage churches to consider incorporating new people into their PRGs, to bring fresh perspectives and a wider range of voices and congregational representation to their decision-making process. This will help the local church to rethink and reshape their various ministries, as we prepare to enter a new normal.

### **What is the process of approval?**

For plans effective after May 28, we ask the PRG to draft the plans. The PRG is tasked to make plans on behalf of the church. For the purpose of providing an opportunity for accountability and consensus, we recommend that the church council (administrative board) approve the plan. Upon reaching consensus the plan should be

submitted to the District Superintendent for review only, using the google form or M.A.P. word document.

### **Why do plans need to be submitted?**

We ask that plans related to safety/mitigation measures be submitted for review to the District Superintendent for the purpose of accountability. As long as the churches are developing plans that demonstrate careful consideration of safety measures and an awareness of any change in emerging cases in their locality, District Superintendents will not intervene in the decision-making process. In situations where the plan does not incorporate important safety measures for all people, the District Superintendents may provide feedback or ask that the plan be reworked. The review is not intended to restrict the churches, but to assist and support all of our churches in making the best decisions for their members moving forward.

### **Timeline for plans for review?**

Be real and don't submit plans at 5:30 pm on Friday for Sunday Morning. Please give the District Superintendent a good two weeks prior to the change or event.

### **What if pastors are not comfortable with the decision of the PRG?**

There will be moments when pastors will have to serve as the balance or safety valve as we resume activities but maintain safety as a priority. Pastors will have the authority to delay the execution of the plan.

### **When do I start submitting the M.A.P. for review to the District Superintendent?**

We ask that any changes made after May 28th should be shared to the District Superintendent for review. If the changes made were based on the letter released on May 15th, 2021, and your church decided to implement the change after May 28th, there is still no need for approval. Some districts might utilize surveys to seek information on how the churches implemented changes based on the May 15th letter, but as stated there is no need to seek approval.

### **Other questions**

#### **Do I need to report the immediate changes made, based on the letter published on May 15th?**

The letter states, "... churches can make some changes immediately as guided by their Healthy Church Team (HCT) and with the approval of the pastor, without District

Superintendent's approval." A separate M.A.P. or approval is not necessary based on the letter, if the changes were made prior to May 28th, 2021.

**Do I need to submit multiple M.A.P. for every change our church decides to make?**

The intent of the M.A.P. was to allow churches to submit an overarching mitigation plan pertaining to their ministries.

**Can I ask PRG questions about what we can do and cannot?**

When the PRG is asked by a local church to provide answers regarding specific ministry activities, we will encourage the local church to make a deliberation by creating a consensus in the church. However, we still encourage the churches to reach out so we can provide information to help the churches make the safest decisions. Your questions also help us know where we need to provide more clarity and the possibilities of creating best practices.

**What happens if a church has a positive case?**

We require alerting the congregation about the positive case, without revealing the identity of the individual who has tested positive. We ask churches to assist with contact tracing efforts. Reporting the case to the District Superintendent is required. Those testing positive, or those who may have come in close contact with someone who tested positive (attended the same worship service or event), should be encouraged to seek medical guidance and to follow the recommendation of their health care provider with regard to testing, quarantining, etc. Closing down the church is not required at this point, but common sense cleaning measures in keeping with current CDC guidelines, are recommended.

**Where can I access the recording of the past webinars?**

All recordings of the past webinars along with documentation will be posted on Friday mornings. You can find Relaunch webinar page on the latest news or go to <https://vaumc.org/prg-relaunch-webinars/>

**Pastors, please share information with one another in the connection.**

We understand that many pastors might be in areas where internet connection is unstable. We ask you to share the information with them. We need each other, especially in these moment

\*Disclaimer: If the number of positive COVID cases and variance of the virus reaches an unsustainable level, the Annual Conference will retrieve the decision making authority.

## Best Practices

- **Mask Mandates**

Before churches decide to allow unmasking we ask the churches to consider the following

1. We are only able to allow fully vaccinated members to unmask. Although we do not require individuals to show proof of immunity, under an honor system we are asking only fully vaccinated persons to unmask. A number of studies show that fully vaccinated individuals are less likely to have asymptomatic infection or transmit SARS-CoV-2 to others<sup>1</sup>
2. Consider that our decision to allow fully vaccinated people to unmask can be hurtful to those who cannot get vaccinated due to medical reasons, or families with children who are not eligible to receive vaccines.
3. Congregations can consider asking everyone to maintain wearing their masks for the sake of others. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "It is not fair to ask of others what you are not willing to do yourself."
4. Consider and find ways that the church can encourage members to become fully vaccinated. Does the church need to provide more information about the vaccine? Does the church need to offer assistance to help members schedule or physically get to their vaccine appointment?

- **Creating Consensus**

HCTs **were** required to report and receive approval from the District Superintendent to make any changes to their plans. Now the PRG team is asked to submit a plan to the District Superintendent for review only. Then who approves the plan and takes responsibility for the plan?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

1. Ideally we ask PRGs to become a taskforce of the church council. We ask the PRG team to have 2-3 members from their current HCT, a handful of council members, and new voices, such as those with young families and new members in the group. The intentional effort to reach and listen to all members of the body will help the PRG team to recommend not only safe guidelines for all groups to return to the community of faith, but also new plans for the church to reach out to the world.
2. PRG teams are to actively seek ways to collect input and listen to the voice of the congregation, by using surveys, Zoom meetings, and listening sessions.
3. The overall plan created by the PRG team, including safety measures and 'Rethinking & Reshaping' of the vision, should be presented to the church council as a recommendation. The church council should then approve the plan. Mitigation Assistance Plan (M.A.P) is a tool to create safety plans.
4. Upon approval of the plan, church councils are asked to submit ONLY the safety/mitigation measures of their plan to the District Superintendent for review. The M.A.P. document provides a helpful outline that churches may follow. The Pastor also has the authority to ask that the PRG rework the plan before submission to the District Superintendent if the plan does not properly incorporate current mitigation measures that are still in place..

- **'Rethinking & Reshaping' ministries**

We encourage the PRG teams to use this time to 'Rethink & Reshape' the ministries of their church.

1. Use it as an opportunity to revisit the church's vision. If you don't have a vision, it is a great time to start the conversation.
2. If the church is expecting a pastoral transition, please utilize zoom and remote meeting tools to start this conversation with the incoming pastor.
3. Use resources, such as "Chuck Knows Church: Committee" as a tool to start the conversation with members of the church.  
<https://chuckknowschurch.com/the-committee/archives>
4. Set up a date for Relaunch Sunday. The date set by the team should not only be a date to invite the members to relaunch ministry, it can also be used as a vision launching celebration.