

**Updated September 16, 2021**

## **Preschool mask mandate**

We have received requests to provide resources to help preschools to respond to parents who request that their children be exempt from the preschool's mask mandate. We remind each church's preschool to remember that children are one of the most vulnerable groups during this time. We ask churches to remember our recommendations regarding volunteers and staff who serve this population. We also believe that churches maintaining a strong policy to protect the children will also continue to make the community safer. To assist the churches and their preschool, we are sharing a sample letter and policy for churches to use.

### **[Sample Letter]**

Date

Dear

Our mission reads in part:

To provide a safe and loving Christian-based environment where children and their families can experience the grace and love of God. Providing a safe environment for preschoolers has been a part of our mission since we opened the doors to the preschool years ago.

As a private, Christian Preschool our faith in Jesus calls us to "Love our Neighbor" (Matthew 22: 34-50; Mark 12: 28-34, Luke 10: 25-37) and to care for the least of these and most vulnerable. We rely on Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience when making decisions. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement summed up three simple rules for a living--

1. Do No Harm.

As we love our neighbors we also seek to keep all people safe, especially those who are most vulnerable and those who are unable to be vaccinated, wearing masks, social distancing, frequent hand washing, increased sanitation, and cleaning are all mitigations we are utilizing in our efforts to love our neighbors and do no harm.

2. Do Good.

In all we do we seek to do good, to share God's love, and be the light of Christ in the world.

Every day we seek to love, nurture, and invite children to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. We see this happening every day in the joy and excitement children bring here at \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool.

At the end of our school year last year, a parent shared this experience:

"Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for loving, teaching, and guiding [my child]. I honestly have never been more grateful, impressed, and thankful for a school, teachers, and directors! You not only exceeded any possible expectations but honestly reminded me how much love and good is in this world. I felt loved and I know [my child] felt loved. I truly feel that feeling is contagious and it also helped us go out and share that in the world. I will forever sing your praises and you should know how special you are."

This is the example of the good we seek to do each day!

3. Stay in Love with God.

We believe that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), therefore our words and actions seek to cultivate the love of all God's people. We believe that teaching children to care for and protect one another is an extension of our love for God. Loving God leads our \_\_\_ Preschool family to cultivate and practice compassion. We see children caring for one another and thinking of others as we model loving God and loving others.

As a licensed preschool, we also rely and look to the Office of Child Care and Safety (formerly Virginia Department of Social Services) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide guidelines on safety. These resources strongly recommend masks for children 2 and up. [COVID-19 Guidelines and Info for Child Care \(August update\) \(virginia.gov\)](#)

As a private Christian preschool dedicated to caring for children, as well as the most vulnerable children who are immunocompromised, we stand by our COVID mitigation mask policy. The Preschool Board has reviewed your requests and the decision has been made not to accept your exemption. We understand this is not the response you would hope to receive and hope that we may respectfully disagree. We wish nothing but the best for you and your family and understand that our preschool may not be the best fit for you at this time.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_ Lead Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_ All Preschool Board Members Signed

**[Sample Policy]**

**Facial Coverings and Other Protective Equipment**

- Children ages two and up should use cloth face coverings when physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Children will arrive at school with a mask (provided from home). When not in use the mask will be stored in a child's individual designated container.
- Face coverings should be cleaned daily, or a new disposable face covering should be used each day. In an emergency, \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool will provide a disposable face covering.

Children will have an opportunity to take their masks off when playing outside and while having lunch or snacks. Masks will not be worn during naps.

The teachers and administration at \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool are committed to providing a quality program that is safe, educational, child-friendly, and fun! We discovered last school year that while many things did seem different with new procedures in place for the safety of all, we still created an environment that fosters fun and learning. It is our goal to draw out and inspire the best in our students as we provide them with opportunities to create, explore, and learn.

As we all know, COVID is unprecedented and is constantly evolving, so the changes in mask policy will remain as the "new normal" until further notice. We will make sure that all changes are realistic and feasible for staff and children by following CDC (Center for Disease Control) guidelines as well as those put forth by the Office of Child Care Health and Safety, Virginia Department of Education

(Formerly the Virginia Department of Social Services.) This document Updated COVID-19 Guidelines for Child Care Programs is attached to this email. We received this information on the evening of August 13, 2021.

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/cc/covid-19-docs/covid-guidelines-child-care-english.pdf>

## **PRG Best Practices for July**

### **Delta Variant and immunization**

Delta Variant is slowly becoming the most dominant Coronavirus strain in the United States. We ask each church's PRG team to remain vigilant and monitor the development of the Delta Variant and cases in each community. We ask each church to review their Mitigation Assistance Plan (M.A.P) and find ways to continue to minister to the community in the most safe and effective way.

Remember that vaccination is the best tool to overcome this pandemic. Studies show that current vaccines show high protection against the variants. On the contrary, the data from June shows that unvaccinated members were extremely vulnerable to variants (["99.2# of US Covid deaths in June were unvaccinated"](#) - the Guardians) .

Churches can do the following to assist the effort of the community to overcome this threat. 1) Continue to encourage vaccination - view ['Church's role in vaccination'](#) and 2) protect the unvaccinated population by continuing the mitigation measures, such as masking and social distancing.

### **Church Nurseries and VBS**

We need to remember that children under 12 years of age are not eligible to receive vaccinations. Therefore, any ministry activities involving children should follow the guidance of previous guidelines. Remember that many of our updated guidelines were based on fully vaccinated individuals.

According to Executive Order 79, "D. Masks – Public and Private K-12 Schools All students, teachers, staff, and visitors must wear a mask over their nose and mouth while on school property subject to section C." Even though churches are not school property, churches should follow the general guidelines to protect our children, by considering;

- Require all students, volunteers, staff, and visitors to wear a mask over their nose and mouth. According to the CDC guidelines a child over 2 year old should wear a mask.
- Strongly recommend fully vaccinated members to volunteer, and implement screening for each volunteer, before the gathering.
- Try to use outdoor spaces as much as possible.
- Understanding that Nurseries will be located outdoors, apply other mitigation methods to

decrease the risk of contagion.

- We recommend limiting the opportunities of consuming snacks during the event. Individually packed snacks may be shared, after the event, for consumption at home.

## **Worship service with non-members - Funerals and Weddings, etc.**

There are some worship services that might include outside guests, such as funerals and weddings. We ask churches to consider the following, as they prepare a plan.

- We recommend that all worship services follow the M.A.P for worship, developed by the church's PRG team.
- Consider how to communicate with non-members who might not be familiar with the church's mitigation process.
- Clearly communicate with the hosting family the expectations.
- Find ways to register or secure a list of attendees for contact tracing.
- Eating after the event has potential to increase the risk. Consider individually packed food, eating outdoors. If planned to host a potluck, refer to the 'Best Practices for potlucks' at <https://vaumc.org/prg-best-practices/>

## **Can we open our community clothes closets?**

This decision should be made by the church's PRG team. In making the decision we ask your church to consider the following;

- Should we allow fully vaccinated individuals to unmask?
- Should we limit the number of people entering the store? Many clothes closets might have limited spacing and limited ventilation. Consider the safest number of occupancy that will encourage proper social distancing and ventilation.
- Should we move the clothes closets outdoors?

## **Can we hold a bake sale?**

This decision should be made by the church's PRG team. In making the decision we ask your church to consider the following;

- How can we limit the number of people preparing the baked goods?
- How can we ensure that every item of the sale is pre-packaged?
- Should we hold the bake sale outside?

## **Can we host a choir practice?**

This decision should be made by the church's PRG team. In making the decision we ask your church to consider the following;

- How can we make sure that every choir member is fully vaccinated? Studies still show that singing has a higher risk of spreading the particles. Therefore, we strongly encourage that only fully vaccinated members attend the choir practice.
- If only fully vaccinated members attend the practice, should we still mask? The church should make the decision, but if unmasked, we ask for choirs to implement other mitigation measures to lower the risk of spread; such as maintaining proper distancing and maximizing ventilation.

## Best Practice Week 7

### Can we host a potluck?

We believe that the best practice is to eat outside with prepackaged food. Outside eating provides opportunities for better ventilation and proper physical distancing. However, we also understand that churches would like to host indoor eating opportunities. We ask you to consider the following:

1. Review the guidelines on 'Hosting gatherings or cook-outs' by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). [Click here to read the guidelines.](#)
2. If preparing a potluck, limit the number of people handling or serving food. The best option is to cater the entire meal from a restaurant. Have a minimal number of gloved volunteers to serve the food rather than self-serve. Use disposable plates and utensils. Maintain social distancing and masking while standing in line to receive food.
3. Use large areas that have proper ventilation and where the tables can be spaced out.
4. Seating should also maintain proper social distancing, while individuals from the same household can sit closer together.
5. Provide hand sanitizers around the area so people can frequently wash their hands.
6. Limit the time of fellowship indoors, encouraging the fellowship to continue outside, after the meal.

**What happens when the church is informed about a positive case?** - When a member who attended a service informs the pastor of their positive COVID-19 diagnosis, what are the steps the pastor/ church should take?

**Step 1.** Notify all members attending the service/ event using the template below. Continue to keep close contact with the member who tested positive. Remember to be pastoral as your church cooperates with the effort of contact tracing.

**Step 2.** Close off the section of the church where the member sat who attended the service/ event and conduct deep cleaning in that area.

**Step 3.** Inform the District Superintendent and the local health department of the positive case, and provide regular updates on the infection and mitigation measures completed to the district.

**Step 4.** Evaluate to determine if this was an isolated case or if multiple cases have developed in consultation with the local health department.

**If multiple cases have developed, review** the M.A.P. and ask the P.R.G. team to determine ways to improve mitigations to prevent future outbreaks. Make assessment according to the following criteria:

1. Was the mitigation planned out well?
2. Was the mitigation plan properly implemented in accordance with the MAP?
3. Even though it was planned well and properly implemented, did we determine that we still had an exposure?

Continue to monitor for any secondary cases. Consult with the District Superintendent and health department in the event of an outbreak.

[Church Letterhead]

[Date]

[Contact Information]

Subject: Potential COVID-19 Exposure and Precautions at \_\_\_\_\_ UMC

Dear Friends:

I am writing to you and the congregation, who attended \_\_\_\_\_am worship service on \_\_\_\_\_ [insert date] to discuss the protocol for handling a potential exposure to COVID-19, also known as the Coronavirus. Please pray for our broader church community during this stressful time.

A worshiper who attended the \_\_\_\_\_ a.m. service at \_\_\_\_\_ on [insert month, date, and year] has tested positive for COVID-19. Any individuals who were in close contact, as defined by the Virginia Department of Health as within 6 feet (with or without mask) for 15 minutes or longer during a 24-hour period, have been notified directly. Fully vaccinated individuals are not required to quarantine, but we ask you to remain vigilant. **If you have not been directly notified you are not medically impacted by this diagnosis.**

Our church leadership and PRG team members are closely monitoring this situation. We have thoroughly cleaned the areas of possible exposure and reviewed (or reviewed and updated) our



health mitigation plans. I will continue to keep you informed of developments. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Please remain vigilant and continue to keep our church and this community in your prayers.

In Christ, ,

Rev. [REDACTED],

Senior Pastor

[REDACTED] UMC

Enclosure

cc: [Insert District Superintendent's Name], District Superintendent  
[REDACTED] District] (Via Email)

Steve Summers, Assistant to the Bishop ([SteveSummers@vaumc.org](mailto:SteveSummers@vaumc.org))

## Week 6 Best practices

### Explaining Executive Order 79

In accordance with the new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Governor of Virginia has eased all distancing and capacity restrictions as of Friday, May 28, 2021. So, read in conjunction with each other, what do Executive Order 79 and the CDC guidelines state?

- That masks and appropriate physical distancing remains as a critical tool in protecting yourself and others who are not fully-vaccinated.
- That, with limited exceptions, all individuals in the Commonwealth aged five and older should cover their mouth and nose with a mask and maintain appropriate physical distance.
- That only fully-vaccinated individuals do not have to wear masks in most indoor settings, except on public transit, in health care facilities, and surrounded in large crowded settings.
- That those who are unvaccinated or not fully-vaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear masks and maintain physical distance in ALL settings.
- That businesses retain the ability to require masks in their establishments.
- That employees who work in restaurants, retail, fitness, personal care, and entertainment must continue to wear masks unless fully vaccinated.
- That the mask wearing requirement has been eased for ALL persons while they are eating, drinking or taking communion.

The full text of Executive Order Seventy-Nine, can be found [here](#), The [new guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is also available.

*\*contributed by Reba Miller, PRG team member, Attorney & Registered Nurse*

### Explaining how churches can ask staff to be vaccinated

On May 28, 2021, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) issued an [update](#) to its December 2020 guidance regarding COVID-19 vaccinations and incentive programs. Section K, Vaccinations, of the EEOC’s question and answer document, [What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws](#) provides guidance indicating that an employer may require all employees physically entering the workplace to be vaccinated for COVID-19.

As a best practice, an employer introducing a COVID-19 vaccination policy and requiring documentation or other confirmation of vaccination should notify all employees that the employer will consider requests for reasonable accommodation based on disability on an individualized basis. The *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* requires an employer to maintain the confidentiality of employee medical information, such as documentation or other confirmation of COVID-19 vaccination. Although the EEO laws themselves do not prevent employers from requiring employees to bring in documentation or other confirmation of vaccination, this information, like all medical information, must be kept confidential and stored separately from the employee's personnel files under the ADA. If employers choose to implement a COVID-19 vaccination incentive policy, they must ensure that it clearly reflects the rights afforded by and obligations imposed by federal and state laws.

*\*contributed by Ms. Reba Miller, PRG team member, Attorney & Registered Nurse*

## **Understanding Immunocompromised**

Our immune system is a wonderfully complex means by which we are able to fight infection. If someone is immunocompromised, they have lost some or much of their natural ability to fight certain kinds of infections. This may be because of undergoing chemotherapy or due to medications, or it may be due to a health condition. As a result, they may not have as protective a response to the COVID-19 vaccine, or may not be able to receive the vaccine at all.

Many of our congregations may have members who are immunocompromised. As we develop our plans for church activities including worship, we need to consider how we include and protect these individuals. What mitigation measures need to be maintained, such as masks and social distancing, so that all our congregation members feel included and loved?

*\*contributed by Dr. Karen McElfish, M.D., Pediatrician, PRG Team member*

## **Best practices on masking**

We are still in liminal space - many people attending church are vaccinated but some are not. Pastors and PRG teams will need to discuss carefully the "strongly

encouraged” and “must wear” language regarding masks in EO 79. Pastors and PRG teams will want to

- 1) understand the limits for removal of masks
- 2) remain committed to protecting the vulnerable (children, immunocompromised, etc)
- 3) consider all the possible settings where people will be gathered at the church and create best practices in each context to observe those limits
- 4) create multiple ways to communicate in a clear and consistent, compassionate and firm voice how the church will practice the limits of removing masks
- 5) create a judgement free atmosphere for those who are not, cannot, or have not yet been vaccinated. Every person and situation is unique and each person is to be respected no matter what their vaccination status.

Because some of our beloved sisters and brothers may be impatient to remove masks *carte blanche*, continuing to observe any limits may not be received well. As in all things, speaking with one voice from the PRG and pastor, leading by example, speaking compassionately and firmly for the vulnerable, and having direct conversations with those who resist will go a long way to address this temporary situation. Each difficult conversation is an opportunity for holy conferencing, pastoral care and an opportunity to grow in Christian discipleship.

*\*contributed by Rev. Leigh Anne Taylor, PRG Team*

## **Posting information on Website**

In an effort to relaunch most effectively, we must remember that the church is the only institution that exists to serve those outside of our membership. Our community members need to be aware of our safety protocols. As we advise our membership and District Superintendent of any changes in gathering practices, we need to make that announcement public on whatever platform(s) best reach the members of our community at-large.

*\*contributed by Ms. Heather Gomez, PRG Team member*

## **Sample M.A.P. (Mitigation Assistance Plan)** 5/28/2021

*After plans are approved by your Church Leadership Team/Church Council, please submit your plans to your District Superintendent for review at least two weeks prior to the date of implementation.*

**Name of Church:** *Virginia United Methodist Church*

**Submission Date:** *6/01/2021*

**Implementation Date:** *6/13/2021*

***In most cases, the church's overall mitigation practices will apply to all activities held on church property, or sponsored by the church. Please share your mitigation plans below and provide additional details for any activities that may deviate from these plans, or require additional information.***

***The mitigation plans listed below apply to the following gatherings/ministries/activities: *Worship/ Small Group/ Daycare & Children/ Youth****

***1. HYGIENE Minimum standards: Encourage and provide for***

*frequent hand hygiene (hand washing, sanitizer and helpful signage); continue to sanitize high-touch areas, especially with consecutive worship services/activities in the same space. (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>).*

***We will provide for this by:*** *We encourage all members to be intentional in maintaining proper hygiene during all gatherings. We encourage the use of personal sanitizers. Church will also provide sanitizing stations. We will continue to sanitize high-touch areas between worship services and activities.*

***2. PHYSICAL DISTANCING Minimum standards: Even***

*though physical distancing requirements have been relaxed, distancing may still be appropriate, especially if indoors, unmasked, in a crowded public space, or in congregant settings where the vaccination status of others may be unknown;*

***We will provide for this by:***

*We encourage all gatherings to maintain proper distancing at all times. 6 ft is recommended, but it can be changed according to the setting.*

*Ministries involving youth and children are encouraged to follow the CDC recommendations, where at least two out of the three mitigation measures are in place (Masks, Social Distancing, Outside).*

**3. MASKS Minimum standards:** *Masks are no longer required for fully vaccinated persons indoors or outdoors. Masks are still appropriate when physical distancing cannot be maintained or in congregant settings where persons from multiple households are gathered. Congregations that are considering unmasking indoors may want to consider those in their church family who are not yet vaccinated, including youth and children, and guests or others in attendance whose vaccination status may be unknown.*

**We will provide for this by:**

*· Full vaccinated persons do not need a mask to attend and participate. Masks are recommended, but optional. We know that children under age 12 are not yet eligible to be vaccinated, therefore, we ask you to wear a mask around younger children. All children related ministry functions will require masks for all leaders, volunteers, and children.*

**4. SCREENING Minimum standards:** *Stay home when sick; self-check in at the door with*

*a health acknowledgement poster. This link provides a [download of a Health Acknowledgment poster](#) that can be edited for your use.*

**We will provide for this by:**

*We will continue to ask for a Verbal Health Acknowledgement affirmation for every church event and program. We take attendance for every event, to allow proper contact tracing in events any outbreak.*

**5. LIMIT EXPOSURE Minimum standards:**

*Churches should try to gather outdoors whenever possible. When gathering indoors consider:*

- a. the total amount of time where groups are gathered indoors in any one gathering space;*

*b. the number of people gathered in one space. It is preferable to use larger spaces over smaller ones for all indoor gatherings.*

***We will provide for this by:***

*Consider using larger space for gatherings, and limit the total duration of the event.*

**6. VENTILATION Minimum standards:** Maximize airflow and turnover of air in the occupied space: 6 exchanges per hour is recommended; prioritize outdoor activities whenever possible <https://doc.vaumc.org/News2020/Ventilationrecommendations.pdf>

***We will provide for this by:***

*When the temperature permits, keep windows open when small groups or when worship is taking place.*

*Ensure that all air filters are changed on a regular basis and/or upgrading to higher efficiency filters.*

*Consider the placement of ion and/or infrared air purifiers in rooms to assist with air purification and mold growth.*

*As a long-term goal, consider the addition of an air purification system for the entire HVAC system.*

***Please list below any details for specific gatherings/ministries/activities that require additional information or are not included in the above:***

*Vaccinated Choir members may now practice together unmasked.*

*We will allow eating of foods by all groups by persons, for fully vaccinated members.*

***Please submit your Mitigation Assistance Plan for District Superintendent's review at least two weeks prior to implementation. Contact your District office for more information on how to submit the plan.***

# Best Practices

06/03/2021

## Churches' role in vaccination

As we are transitioning to entrusting our local churches with making decisions to continue ministry in the Post-COVID world, we are constantly asked how church leaders can be part of the effort to encourage our community to be vaccinated. Dr. [Karen McElfish](#), member of both the In-person workgroup and PRG team says, "Clergy and lay leaders in the United Methodist Church have a unique opportunity and responsibility to speak out, encouraging church members to continue safe practices to mitigate against the spread of the virus and to receive the doses of the vaccine once it is available." Click here to download the article she wrote: "COVID-19 Vaccines- How can clergy and lay leaders lead in the new vaccination efforts?"

There is a mission opportunity for the church and leaders to encourage members to be vaccinated, which contributes to creating herd immunity for our community, making the community safer! As a result, this will help members of the local church's PRG team to create a safer environment for worship and ministries.

Here are some links to help church leaders and PRG teams in joining this effort.

### **The Mission Opportunity of COVID-19 vaccines - United Methodist Church**

Churches encouraging community members to receive the COVID-19 vaccine aligns with the commitment of the United Methodist Church to holistic wellbeing. This article shares how encouraging vaccination is part of living out our values, by briefly introducing [Abundant Health](#), committed to creating abundant health for all – a global connection.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/mission-opportunity-of-covid-19-vaccines?fbclid=IwAR1IOMj0xT00j3-HQ8OfLFeiMdg3ppoWJNLoQvhe5bbcxmkLaPBix0qLbcE>

### **Vaccination Tracker**

Note that herd immunity is reached when 70% of the population is vaccinated. CDC is recommending that persons who recovered from COVID-19 still get vaccinated ([CDC FAQ Link](#)) so it means that we need to have 70% of our population to get fully vaccinated to reach herd immunity. The Virginia Department of Health provides a Vaccination summary ([Click here](#)). You may also search 'vaccine tracker' in Google and find where we are at in our effort to reach herd immunity ([Google search sample link](#)).

### **How Can Faith Leaders Help End the COVID-19 Pandemic? Support the COVID-19 vaccination effort - Association of Immunization Managers**



A two page document that will help your church to be involved in the local effort of encouraging vaccination for every member. This can be shared with the PRG team and church leaders to find a way to be involved.

<https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.immunizationmanagers.org/resource/collection/C51290B5-3749-4FC1-8F88-330CF4266E05/AIMFaithLeadersHandout.pdf>

### **COVID Vaccine Graphics: Why Get it, and What Happens Next? - Public Health Communications Collaboratives**

A downloadable poster, in English and Spanish, the church can post on their bulletin board or use in newsletters. Being published on Mar. 17th, 2021, some of the information might need extra explanation, but it provides adequate information to encourage vaccination. Korean translation of the poster is available. Please email [serving@vaumc.org](mailto:serving@vaumc.org) to receive the Korean translation.

<https://publichealthcollaborative.org/resources/covid-vaccine-graphics-why-get-it-and-what-happens-next/>

However, the best way to encourage people is to have multiple one-on-one conversations. Continue to reach out to your community with love. Continue to pray for walls to be torn down, and misinformation to be dismantled. We are called to share the Good News of Jesus to this world, wouldn't this be a similar process to encourage others to join in this effort?

# Best Practices

06/03/2021

## Step-by-step approach to resuming Communion

We acknowledge communion is a response to God's love through the expression of our faith community. We long to come together to fulfill our spiritual hunger. At the same time, we understand that our normal practice of communion creates situations where physical distancing is difficult which increases the risk of the virus spreading among our most vulnerable members. So we believe the practice of pre-distributed and prepackaged communion is the best solution. We understand the risk tolerance can differ in every locality. So we want to offer some step by step practices as we enter into the post-covid era.

Having the congregation come to the center may increase the risk, so as an alternative the Communion presider (pastor & church leaders) may distribute the elements using the empty pews along the following steps:

**Step 1** - Fully vaccinated pastor/church leader may travel through empty rows and personally hand out prepackaged communion on trays

**Step 2** - Fully vaccinated pastor/church leader may travel through empty rows and personally hand out wafers and individual cups on trays

**Step 3** - Fully vaccinated pastor/church leader may travel through empty rows and personally break bread using gloves or sanitizing their hands, along with individual cups

**Step 4** - Fully vaccinated pastor/church leader may travel through empty rows and personally serve communion through intinction

For churches who want the congregation to come down the center aisle, we ask you to maintain proper social distancing by using the similar step by step approach presented above. All churches may decide how they would like to implement the practice of sharing communion according to their context.

Finally, knowing that many congregations will have members joining worship via the online broadcast, please be mindful that the time we distribute the elements can become a "dead time" on air and it is possible to lose participants. Today we invite you to the Both/And Hybrid worship webinar presented tonight at 6:30 PM, where Jason Moore will present practical ideas to lead worship in a hybrid world. Pre-registration is required [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_0SCq2KdxRjK1MK4g4IEZdg](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_0SCq2KdxRjK1MK4g4IEZdg)

# 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
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?

# Best Practices

## 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?

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..

## Best Practices

### '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.