



**CHURCH
AMBASSADOR**
NETWORK

Church Leader Call with PA Secretary of Health Dr. Levine on COVID-19 May 5, 2020

*Additional questions? Contact Kurt Weaver, Director of the Church Ambassador Network
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The Secretary's Opening Summary

COVID- 19 continues to pose a significant threat. During the last call in March, the focus was on stopping the curve, and all of the prevention has helped to flatten the curve so that there was not an exponential increase in cases.

Everyone should be heartened, but we are not done yet. We are starting a slow phase program to reopen. This will need to be done in a slow and progressive way, starting in rural areas and will progress to more urban areas. Right now, everywhere is red. The yellow phase is a partial reopening, and the green phase is a more comprehensive reopening. Counties in north central and north western PA could start in yellow phase on Friday, May 8. Business guidance will go out. We still want social distancing and telework as much as possible, as well as encouraging people to wash hands, use hand sanitizer, and use masks. The Governor is looking at other areas like the Southwest to be one of the next areas to move to the yellow phase. We will continue to look at data, and, no, there is no specific time table. We will need to have more widespread testing and need to diagnose those who are tested and stop outbreaks. When the virus is more controlled, then counties can go to the green phase.

Questions and Answers¹

What's the latest about when churches can meet, particularly for Mother's Day?

There are no specific requirements that churches cannot meet. Recommendations are that you be as remote as possible (best way to keep everyone safe, especially in the red zones). If you do meet, no direct contact, 6 ft away. Yellow zone - no more than 25 people in an area. We want to celebrate mothers but do it in a safe way that protects their health and the health of the community.

¹ This is not an exact transcript and hits only the key questions and answers.

What are the predictions in the green zone and any specific recommendations?

No specific recommendations in the green zone. Still consider wearing masks for the foreseeable future and wash your hands. No specific number limits in a church.

Should my church move forward with plans to do a service trip to help those in Puerto Rico?

We hope things will be better in August, but have not looked at numbers there recently. A concern would be the contact traveling and on a plane. Some of the decision depends on risk. If you have significant medical problems or are at risk, then we would recommend being more cautious. There are a lot of different factors.

What are recommendations for children's services, summer schools, or Vacation Bible Schools (VBS)?

PA Department of Health is working on summer camps and summer school guidance right now and expect to have this guidance by the end of the week. Recommendations - as few programs as possible, especially in red zone. Limit them as much as possible in the yellow zone.

Are there any set guidelines for cleaning churches?

It is recommended that churches follow the same cleaning guidelines as businesses, which can be found from the PA Department of Health. This is not a requirement for churches, but it is a strong recommendation.

Should a church clean after every gathering in a church, even if we only use the building once a week?

Strong recommendations (not requirement) but yes, after every in-person gathering held in a church there should be a cleaning. Cleaning guidelines are available on their website.

Will church goers be required to wear masks?

There will not be a requirement (police won't be coming into any church to check), but it's a strong recommendation because it protects public health.

Can churches meet together before there is a vaccine?

Yes, churches can meet before a vaccine. Realistically, we're looking at 2021 for a vaccine.

As the weather is getting warmer, will outdoor services be encouraged over indoor ones?

Yes, but in red zones we still recommend or hope services will be remote.

Can churches do drive-in meetings?

If everyone truly does practice social distancing, that would be safe. (The state is looking to allow drive-in graduation ceremonies in yellow zones.)

If there is singing at our service, should people be further than 6ft?

Don't know the answer, but wouldn't be surprised if more distance was needed when singing. There is nothing magical about 6ft, and it is not a guarantee. The general recommendation is to not be congregating in red zones. If you are congregating, then certainly space out more than 6ft if singing.

Are there any concerns with water baptism and the spread of COVID-19?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through water. Person-to-person contact is what has been identified.

Where can we find guidelines our leaders can follow, knowing they are correct, and will the PA Department of Health give specific guidelines to churches?

This information can be found on the PA Department of Health website. There is currently guidance for businesses, but I will ask the governor about churches.

What should we do to keep those in the church building safe?

Careful cleaning, meeting remotely in red phase are good measures. Remember that it is transmitted through respiratory droplets in the air. As we go in yellow and green phases, keeping people safe will look like wearing masks, washing hands, and limiting personal contact. In green zones, people should still be vigilant about washing hands and recommended mask wearing.

We are thankful that PA has recognized the essential nature of religious institutions. Essential businesses through April have been tasked with conducting in-person business only when necessary but where not feasible, to limit occupancy to no greater than 50%. Will the 50% occupancy remain the same for us in the yellow phase or does that increase to a different percentage?

The answer here by the Secretary of Health seemed to indicate that size of the area is the key factor. So, although larger and smaller are not defined, larger areas cannot exceed 50% occupancy, provided all of the other cleaning, mitigation, and social distancing requirements are also being followed.

Any guidance about home services?

Not sure what this means about home services. If pastors or reverends go to a home then they would still have contact, but a smaller number is better than a larger number.

How can key public partnerships work with religious leaders to help keep people safe and healthy?

We want to continue public/private health partnerships. It is so important to have discussions like this. If any of you want to talk with me, reach out to my assistant, Parker. We want to have as much collaboration and communication as possible with our so important faith leaders.

The Church Ambassador Network is a project of the Pennsylvania Family Institute.

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