

Webinar: Developing Your Church Re-Entry Plan

July 14, 2020, 7 – 8 pm

Webinar Recording

The call was not recorded on Zoom, but an audio-only recording is available, starting sometime when Dr. Potter was presenting. It can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/RNdgunr7gac>

Welcome & Introductions – Dr. Sara Wilcox

Sara Wilcox began the call & welcomed and thanked the churches for joining. Faith-Based Committee Members on the call introduced themselves. She asked churches to sign-in to the call by typing their name and church in the Chat box (later, those joining only by phone were asked to introduce themselves).

Sara Wilcox & Vernon Kennedy, Sr. co-chair the Faith-Based Committee of Fairfield Forward (<https://fairfieldforward.org/>)

This webinar was planned by the committee to give churches in Fairfield County an opportunity to hear from DHEC and have Q&A and Discussion about re-opening churches with issues that might be specific to the county.

Dr. Wilcox introduced the speakers – Dr. Potter and representatives from 3 churches in Fairfield County.

Dr. Henry G. Potter, Medical Director, Midland Public Health Region, SC DHEC

Dr. Potter recommended two websites/documents that provide a great deal of guidance for churches:

1. SC Accelerate (released in May) - <https://accelerate.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/FaithbasedOrganizationGuidanceDocument.pdf>
2. CDC's guidance to faith communities - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

He provided some general guidance/recommendations/considerations:

- Many churches have older members who are especially vulnerable to COVID because of their age and existing health conditions – every church must consider their congregation and develop a plan that minimizes risk – there's not a checklist that indicates when your church can resume services
- Require that face coverings be worn
- Prohibit hugs (which he recognizes is difficult in churches)
- Encourage good hand hygiene – handwashing with soap and water, hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol), etc.
- Don't allow congregating in restrooms
- There is a list of epa-registered disinfectants available - <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>
- See if there's a way to increase better circulation and filtration in your church
 - Avoid just blowing a fan on people; exhaust fans that pull air from inside to outside would be better

- Consider whether your church needs more than 1 service to accommodate 6 feet physical distancing
- If you can project the hymns and responses, and not use hymnals or papers, that is ideal
- Communion – consider wafers & distribution of single-serving options
- Offering plate – do not pass it; if you can do online contributions, that is best; if you take up a collection, ask people to drop their contribution
 - Staff should wear gloves while handling
 - Staff can spray disinfectant on money & coins (but be careful with checks as the ink could run!)
- After services, encourage people to gradually leave the church (e.g., perhaps an usher can dismiss people) and encourage people to go outside and not congregate in indoor areas
- If your church serves food, avoid buffets and family-style meals. Instead, have pre-packaged options
- Encourage those who are high risk to postpone attending in person until counts are reduced
- What about liability (question posed to Dr. Potter)? Following CDC guidelines and telling your members the guidelines and expectations will help to protect you from liability

Deacon Neco Green, Bible Light Holiness Church

1. Bible Light followed many of the suggestions Dr. Potter provided (and thus said he would not repeat those)
2. They developed a Task Force that carefully reviewed CDC & DHEC guidelines
3. They examined whether their facility was up-to-code with being able to follow these guidelines
4. They considered how many people could fit in a service while being compliant with physical distancing guidelines and decided they would need to offer 2 services
5. For their financial offerings, they ask people to contribute electronically. They will also encourage people who do not give electronically to put their contributions in a pre-sealed envelope and drop their contributions (not passing of an offering plate)
6. They've designated centers in case of emergencies where people who become sick will go
7. The Task Force met with ushers and church leaders to review the plan and provide training
8. They sent packages to all members letting them know what to expect
9. They have signs up to remind people of guidelines, and they also have 6-foot spacing signs
10. They have decided to postpone opening for now given COVID numbers in SC
11. Mr. Vernon Kennedy Sr. shared that the full plan for Bible Light Holiness is on their website (<https://www.biblelightholinesschurch.org/>)

Dr. Rev. Robert Scotland, Shiloh First Presbyterian Church

1. Shiloh is also following many of the recommendations Dr. Potter provided (and thus said he would not repeat those)
2. They have not yet returned to in-person services; services are streamed on Zoom. They are finding that most of their members, many of whom are older, are able to navigate Zoom just fine
3. They formed a Committee to review CDC & DHEC guidelines
4. They were planning to resume in-person services in August, but will likely delay further
5. They hired a company who did a deep cleaning of everything in the church
6. They have developed a plan for how people will enter & exit the building
7. Members will be seated to ensure proper physical distance

Rev. Dillon Pullen, Cornerstone Church of God

1. Cornerstone is following many of the recommendations Dr. Potter provided & the other two churches are doing (and thus said he will not repeat those)
2. They did drive-in services prior to re-opening on June 5 – they had very good attendance at these drive-in services!
3. On June 5, they began in-person worship
4. They require face coverings and have not had members react negatively to this requirement
5. They are following physical distancing and found that when they re-opened, initially only around 30% of members chose to worship in person – that has increased to closer to 50%. They are considering adding a second service if their attendance increases.
6. They had multiple hand sanitizer stations
7. They have posted signs for how to prevent COVID – both outside (so people see it before they even get in the building) and inside, along with their rules
8. Prior to re-opening, they sent letters to all members letting them know what to expect and the rules
9. They checked in with their insurance company to make sure that they were also following any requirements outlined by them. They were able to add some coverage related to COVID. Rev. Pullen encourages churches to consult with their insurance company to minimize risk of liability issues.

Other points that came up:

- Churches might consider a sign-in so that if someone tests positive for COVID, they will know who was at church (Sara added to suggest that members bring their own pens to sign in 😊)
- What should churches do if they learn someone tested positive for COVID? Ideas were to encourage the pastor (or another church leader with good rapport with the person) to talk to them and encourage them to know come back to worship until the infection has resolved and they are tested negative for COVID.
- How do handle entering and leaving the church? If your church has more than one entrance, try to have a traffic pattern where everyone comes in one door and leaves a different door to minimize people passing one another.
- Churches should consider reaching out to more vulnerable members (i.e., at greater risk of negative consequences of COVID) and encourage them to hold off on in-person attendance

Closing – Mr. Vernon Kennedy, Sr.

Mr. Kennedy thanked all of the churches who participated on the call and all of the faith-based committee members of Fairfield Forward to calling churches

Churches are a critical force in Fairfield County, and our committee would like to share information and resources with churches.

Please be sure that we have your updated contact information (please email Sara Wilcox wilcox@mailbox.sc.edu or Vernon Kennedy, Sr vkennedy@fairfieldbhs.org)

What other topics are churches interested in hearing about? Please email Sara Wilcox or Vernon Kennedy, Sr. with any ideas you might have! We could do Zoom calls on other topics.