Practical risk management guidance
to help today's Christian ministries thrive

MOVING FORWARD
IN A TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

SPECIAL ISSUE
The coronavirus pandemic has challenged many churches to quickly find new ways to reach the hungry and hurting.

In this unusual time, we continue to hold firm to the Gospel truth that unites us all. As states begin lifting the limitations on gathering in person, there’s reason to be joyous. There’s also much planning ahead.

This special issue of *The Deacon's Bench* highlights some areas that play a key role in your gathering game plan. From cleaning to social distancing, children’s ministry to pastoral health, there are many considerations for the care and safety of your people.

As you move forward, ministries are encouraged to review recommendations from your local and state officials and the guidance developed by the CDC for places of worship.

The information provided in this publication is intended to be helpful, but it does not constitute legal advice and is not a substitute for the advice from a licensed attorney in your area. We strongly encourage you to regularly consult with a local attorney as part of your risk management program.
Communication: Reduce Fear and Increase Connection

During this time of coronavirus, communication has been a key factor in keeping people connected. No matter what stage your ministry is in right now, ongoing communication with your employees, volunteers, and congregation remains an important element. Open communication about what to expect and any changes you plan to implement at church can help alleviate fear and anxiety. Ask yourself what you’d want to know at church and for activities, if you were a greeter, staff member, elderly church member, etc. Then, develop answers. You’ll soon have a long list of things to say.

Don’t wait

It’s important to start painting a broad picture of your ministry’s plans as soon as possible. People will have a lot of questions about how to safely gather for church services and community activities. Transparency is key. You don’t have to explain every nuance, but it’s important to provide enough details to reassure each segment of your audience.

Communicate often

Communicate as often as you can, through as many channels as possible. Even if you don’t know all the answers, it’s important to share what you do know and be honest about what you don’t. When the air is static with questions, few things fuel anxiety more than silence. It’s comforting to know that your leaders are working to address concerns, even if they don’t have solutions yet.
Develop a core message

If you haven't already, develop a core message. It might reiterate your ministry's values or mission or simply provide reassurance. Ministry leaders will face numerous hurdles as they strive to resume normal operations. Having a core message helps you to express empathy and support over time.

Segment your audience

List each audience you'll address, along with their information needs. Most ministries have at least three groups: staff, volunteers, and church attendees. While your first message about resuming normal operations may be broad enough for the congregation, successive ones will need to include details tailored to each group of people. Don't forget to highlight information specific to vulnerable individuals, who are at higher risk for illness from coronavirus.

While details will differ by ministry, most organizations will need to address topics such as scheduling, logistics, sanitation, social distancing, and any changes in their operating procedures. Here are some points to consider for staff, volunteers, and attendees:

Staff

Timing
How soon will employees be expected to return to the office? Will everyone come back at once, or will the process be phased or staggered? What options are available to staff members caring for children or vulnerable people?

Disease Mitigation
What efforts are being taken to sanitize the workplace and protect employees against illness? Are there any new social distancing requirements? Will masks or other protective gear be needed?

Vulnerable People
Are any special accommodations being made for employees who are vulnerable to illness? May they work from home or return to the office at a later date than other staff?

Furloughed or Laid-off Employees
What are the plans for bringing back any furloughed or laid-off employees? How soon might this happen? Will staff resume their former positions? What steps have been taken to ensure that the ministry follows a fair process for deciding who comes back first, next, and so on? What changes might staff encounter when they return to work?

Volunteers

Changes
What should volunteers expect upon their return? Will they need to wear masks and gloves? Sanitize children’s areas differently? Avoid shaking hands or passing an offering plate? How will greeters’ roles change? What measures should volunteers take to protect themselves and others to prevent disease spread? Will you have new or existing volunteer roles to fill?

Disease Mitigation
What measures are the ministry taking to reduce the likelihood that volunteers get sick while carrying out their duties? Will certain high-touch ministries, like child care, be suspended or altered in order to safeguard volunteers?
Attendees

Logistics
Will you hold in-person church services?
Will you continue offering online services or alternative ways of connecting remotely? Will you do both, for some period of time? If so, how long will you offer off-site services for people who are too ill or too afraid to resume meeting with others? Have any weekend service times or locations changed? What's happening to mid-week gatherings, such as Bible studies, small groups, or youth activities?

Social Distancing
Will there be guidelines addressing how close people are allowed to sit near each other at church or for activities? Must they avoid shaking hands or stand a certain distance apart when talking to one another?

Disease Mitigation
What sanitation measures will the ministry implement to help prevent the spread of coronavirus? What areas will be sanitized? How often?

Changes
What changes should people expect? Will communion be served differently? How will offerings be taken? Will there be coffee and donuts? Should parents of small children expect child care to be available right away?

Vulnerable People
What efforts are being made to protect people who are elderly, pregnant, or who have chronic lung disease? Some people may need to avoid all social gatherings – even worship services in other’s homes – until there’s a vaccine for coronavirus. How does the church plan to minister to this group of people?

Remember the big picture
You won’t be able to answer every conceivable question. That’s okay. Just do your best to thoughtfully consider the concerns that may come up and address them as best as you can. Every church is trying to figure out how to safely meet together. You’re in good company. It’s important to stay calm, keep the faith, and stay the course.

Don’t forget to review your infectious disease plan. Read more at The Deacon’s Bench Online.
www.brotherhoodmutual.com/db/covid
Stepping up your cleaning and disinfecting practices can help minimize the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19 as you return to worship services.

The coronavirus may be spread by touching a contaminated surface – it may be viable for hours to days on chairs, desks, pews, counters, door handles, phones, computer keys, microphones, and more. Experts say that cleaning of surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in community settings.

Cleaning Products

Using the right disinfecting product is important. It is expected that many existing disinfectants will be effective against the virus. Make sure to follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfecting products (e.g., concentration, application method, and contact time, etc.).

If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

Advice from an Expert

To reduce surface contamination, it’s important to follow a two-step process of cleaning and then disinfecting. “This means being a little more diligent with your procedures. For example, making sure to disinfect high-touch surfaces like light switches, doorknobs, touchscreens, and tabletops,” said Tim Cool, chief solutions officer with Smart Church Solutions. He reminds everyone that preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your work or gathering place takes a combination of everyday precautions (washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, using hand sanitizer, disposing of used tissues properly, and following cough etiquette) and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces frequently.

Update Your Cleaning Procedures

As you plan to improve your cleaning and disinfecting procedures, work with your team to develop a robust process. The following questions can help you get started.

• What is our current cleaning and disinfecting process? What additional cleaning measures do we need to take?

• Are we aware of the most recent CDC guidance regarding cleaning and disinfecting?
• Do we have the necessary supplies to clean and disinfect surfaces? Some items include gloves, masks, cleaners, disinfecting wipes, and disinfecting sprays.

• Does our cleaning process concentrate on wiping down high-touch surfaces? Common surfaces include:
  - Sanctuary chairs/pews
  - Door handles
  - Table or counter tops (wipe the bottom side as well)
  - Touch-screen electronics
  - Restroom fixture handles
  - Light switches
  - Chairs in new mothers’ room
  - Changing tables

Children’s Ministry

If we decide to continue our children’s activities, does our cleaning process involve high-touch children’s activity surfaces? Common surfaces include:
  - Toys and bins
  - Doors
  - Handles

  - Tables and chairs
  - Sinks
  - Check-in stations

Cleaning Communicates Care

It’s a good idea to communicate your updated cleaning procedures. “It’s not going to cost much more to take your cleaning to the next level, but it will help give people peace of mind and communicates care,” said Cool. Make sure to clearly communicate the steps you’ve taken to protect and care for your people.

Read even more about facilities preparation at The Deacon’s Bench Online. www.brotherhoodmutual.com/db/covid

• Opening Your Facility
• Planning for Social Distancing
• Taking the Touch Out of High-Touch Areas
Think Creatively to Maximize Your Children’s Ministry Activities

How do you explain social distancing to children? Are our youngsters ready to see everyone wearing a mask at church? These may be some of the challenges you’re discussing, and you may find you are not quite ready to bring the children’s ministry and activities back to your facility. You’re not alone. Many churches are rethinking this area of ministry as they review their state and community’s recommendations regarding safely resuming kid’s activities while continuing to flatten the curve of coronavirus. This has prompted some creative approaches to safely discipling children and youth. The following ideas may help you as you plan to engage kids and their families during this time of COVID-19.

Engage Virtually

Choosing to delay in-person gathering for kids’ ministry doesn’t mean you must put your children’s outreach activities on hold. There are many ways to engage both children and families with the gospel message. During this time, some churches are continuing to use online resources for their children’s activities even though the adults are beginning to meet in person. Consider the following alternatives to keep your kids engaged:

- Record or livestream special family services. This helps engage children and youth with age-appropriate messaging.

- Host online small groups for children’s ministry. This helps engage smaller groups of kids to maximize participation.

- Offer children’s ministry lessons and videos. Some free resources include:
  - Life.Kids from Life.Church
    www.life.church/kids/media/
  - LifeWay Kids at home
    kidsministry.lifeway.com/2020/03/13/lifeway-kids-at-home
  - Mariners Church Kids Online
    www.marinerschurch.org/kidsonline
  - Saddleback Kids
    www.saddlebackkids.com/online

- Remember to research the online platforms you will be using for children’s ministry. If you are doing anything live, you will want to ask about using passwords, private invitations or links, and privacy/security issues in order to protect your youth, and you will need parent permission.
Gathering Game Plan

Even though your kids’ ministry may not be ready to meet in person yet, you’ll want to be ready to move forward. The following questions can help you develop a plan for your children’s ministry resuming on-site later:

- How will you encourage the use of hand washing, hand sanitizer, or face masks?
- How will you handle check in and check out to maximize distancing?
- Will you host special children’s services for families?
- Will you phase in your kids’ ministry, starting with older children who are more capable of maintaining distance?
- Depending on your ministry’s facility, is there additional space you can use to reduce the number of kids in a room?
- Could you alternate Sundays, having half the number of kids attend one Sunday and the other half the following Sunday?
- If you’re providing a service for families, will you provide children’s activities to keep them engaged during worship?
- Could you keep kids in service for worship, then dismiss them during the sermon to a larger room, like a fellowship hall, where they can watch an age-appropriate bible message?
- Could your children’s activities be held outside where social distancing could be more easily maintained?
- Will you offer a room where parents can feed and change babies? Will you encourage parents to wipe down changing areas and chairs before and after every use?

Vacation Bible School

Summer is VBS season. However, this year may look much different than previous years. As your ministry considers its approach to VBS, the following ideas can help you plan.

- Recruit families who would be willing to host small groups of kids in a backyard VBS. You’ll need to consider best practices for supervision and screening of volunteers, as well as cleaning and disinfecting, and social distancing.
- Wait until the end of summer to host VBS.
- Offer a virtual, at-home VBS.
- Limit the number of participants to maintain distancing.
- Hold VBS activities outdoors.
- Host activities one day per week for five weeks.
- Hold VBS in the fall, after school starts.

For more information and ideas about VBS, LifeWay offers 4 VBS strategies for this summer at www.Lifeway.com/4ways.

Want even more tips about planning for children’s ministry? Your game plan continues at The Deacon’s Bench Online. www.brotherhoodmutual.com/db/covid

- Safe Planning Practices for Gathering
- Staffing Considerations for Children’s Ministry
- Cleaning and Disinfecting
As your congregation gathers for worship, not everyone will be ready or able to join you. We’ve gathered some practical ideas to help you continue the work of the gospel online.

If you haven’t already, take this time to explore the benefits of doing some church activities virtually. See how online tools can support and strengthen your ministry. And don’t go it alone. Reach out to your staff and volunteers to see what experience they have with taking videos and posting online. Ask your congregation for help, you’ll be surprised how many people have expertise in this through their own work or just dabble in it for fun.

You can begin low budget/low tech and expand later. Your attendees will understand that getting the gospel out to them during this difficult time is your goal. Don’t forget to communicate with your congregation and the community about the where, when, and how to attend your online service or activity.

If your church has a website, a Facebook page, or Facebook Group page, then you already have a virtual space to house your video. Take advantage of the tools on Facebook such as the Learning Unit.

You may want to create an account for free video hosting with a site like YouTube or Vimeo. You can film video sermons or messages for your congregation on a smartphone or a webcam and then upload from there. Additionally, a platform like Subsplash (www.subsplash.com) helps you with most of your virtual needs including church website, posting video sermons, group text, and online giving/tithing. With any online platform, be sure to ask about security and privacy.

Get creative with how you design your virtual worship experience. It doesn’t need to be a complete reproduction of your regular services. Ask your team for their ideas. Some questions to ask include:

- What tools do we need for an online experience?
- What elements of our worship service can we do online?
- How do we make the transition to online as easy as possible for people?

The virtual Church is all about bringing people together for worship and to further the work of ministry.

Make sure your gathering game plan includes these additional topics found on The Deacon’s Bench Online. www.brotherhoodmutual.com/db/covid

- Alternate Ways to Host a Service
- Rev Up a Drive-In Service
- Giving in Digital Times
How are you doing? This simple yet complex question can yield amazing insight into how pastors are thinking and feeling right now. Denny Howard, director of counseling and coaching for Full Strength Network (fullstrength.org), a non-denominational Christian clergy family serving ministry, has spoken with more than 60 pastors over the last few weeks. Having counseled more than 6,000 pastors over 20 years, he wanted to hear directly from church leaders about how they were feeling and what they needed.

You’re Not Alone

The majority of pastors Howard spoke with are disquieted in some way. Everything is more complicated in this season. Giving may be down, congregants or their family are getting sick, and leading people from afar takes more time and energy. “It’s ok to be a little bit weary and tired from that,” said Howard.

Many of the pastors he spoke with feel like they aren’t worthy of their position right now. “I think they feel a reduced capacity to be who God has called them to be,” said Howard. This can lead to disappointment and stress. Whatever the challenges or opportunities you have to connect and engage in new ways, it’s also important to be aware of the mental and emotional toll the current situation can have.

Setting Realistic Expectations and Preventing Burnout

Setting reasonable and realistic expectations can help fight the effects of some stress. You may need to change your expectations about how you’re going to shepherd during this time. First, it’s important to consider if the expectations you have of yourself, your leaders, or your congregants are reasonable and realistic for this current time. Are your expectations creating a series of disappointments? This can be a warning sign that burnout may be in your future. “Burnout isn’t caused by working hard. It’s caused by unmet or unrealistic expectations,” said Howard.

Setting realistic expectations not only helps you meet your goals, but it can lead to increased fulfillment in your ministry. Howard offers some strategies that may help. Start by reflecting on what seemed disappointing to you today. Then ask the following questions:

- What was the expectation that led to the disappointment?
- Was that a reasonable expectation given the current circumstances?
- Was that a realistic expectation given the current circumstances?

As an example, many pastors are recording or livestreaming their sermons every week in front of an empty sanctuary. This can be uncomfortable and unnatural, but are you feeling pressure to preach with the same energy as if the sanctuary were full of people? Is your expectation that you’re going to be as good, if not better, then before coronavirus? Stop and ask yourself: Is that reasonable? Is that realistic?

Just remember, if your expectation isn’t reasonable or realistic, it may be wise to modify your expectation. “When you do this, the potential for burnout goes down,” said Howard.
Ministry Routing List

☐ Pastor
☐ Administrators
☐ Office Staff
☐ Board Members
☐ Other

WHAT'S INSIDE

This special issue of The Deacon's Bench helps your church develop a gathering game plan. You’ll find information about communications planning, facilities preparation, considerations for children’s ministry, and pastoral wellbeing. Find even more helpful information at brotherhoodmutual.com/db/covid.