

4 Pastoral Principles to Guide Your Reopening Discussion

The following pastoral principles can help your church frame the reopening conversation in a way that honors God and respects different perspectives.

1. Focus on Christ as Head of the Church

- Praise: Proclaim that Christ is still Head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior (Ephesians 5:23).
- Unity: People trust different news sources, but we must be united by the good news of Jesus Christ.

2. Offer Pastoral Leadership for Worship

- Care: All congregations have lost something during this time. Some have experienced deaths and the bitterness of not being able to mourn together. Even the joy of reconvening will come with reminders of how much the world has changed. We must help our congregations sort through griefs both small and large.
- Call: Reaffirm what we are called to be as the church. Scripture depicts worship in strongly corporate and bodily terms: laying on of hands, greeting with a holy kiss, baptism, celebrating the Lord's Supper, singing together, inviting non-believers into our life and more. Talk about what practices are important to recover.
- Consider: Prayerfully consider the consequences of decisions. For example, if your church does not plan to offer child care when you reconvene, how will that impact young families in your congregation? How should those consequences factor into the decision to have in-person worship?

3. Engage with Authority

- Churches should obey government mandates (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17), unless it conflicts with God's law (Acts 5:29). The vast majority of churches rightly honored their state's guidance to close facilities and carefully weighed the advice of medical experts. Continue to collaborate with authorities.
- Reopening is not the same as closing physical spaces. Guidelines to open are not commands to open. Not everything that is permissible is actually beneficial (1 Corinthians 6). Consider your church's size, building design and other practicalities as you seek to keep congregants and communities safe.

4. Commit to Love

- Love means laying down our lives for others (John 15:13). People have different perspectives about reconvening, and we are commanded to "be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). When your church reconvenes, consider providing resources online for those uncomfortable with joining in person.
- Love observes the imperative to care for the least of these in our midst (Matthew 25).
- Love does no harm to others (Romans 13:8–10) and seeks to prevent a known harm (Exodus 21:28–29). Churches should take care to prevent an outbreak in their communities. If anyone in your congregation contracts COVID-19, it is your responsibility to contact everyone who may have been in the room on the same day to let them know that they have been exposed.
- Love the community as witness (1 Peter 2:12). Part of our witness may include making decisions that the broader community receives as good faith partnership.