



COVID-19 RECOMMENDATIONS & BEST PRACTICES

COVID-19 continues to grow as a public health crisis here in the United States, with over 250,000 confirmed cases and a growing death count. Estimates are now predicting as high as 250,000 deaths will be related to this virus. Every week, we are seeing more drastic measures being taken by federal, state, and local officials to contain this pandemic. Your church and ministry are now faced with unprecedented challenges to continue ministering to those in your care. We all know that there is nothing that is occurring today that has caught God by surprise, and we are thankful for His continued protection and provision for His people. However, as ministry leaders, there are challenges we must face in the coming days and weeks in this highly fluid situation that will need to be closely monitored on a daily basis.

What is the current situation?

At this point, most states and counties have implemented some type of mandate limiting large gatherings or requiring a full stay-at-home/remain-in-place for non-essential employees. A number of counties and states have imposed criminal penalties for violations of these mandates. These unprecedented measures are creating challenges for churches and ministries to continue to operate Christian schools and preschools. Additionally, churches are being forced to rethink the Sunday worship service.

Are the actions of the government constitutional?

The mandates being used by the state and local governments are absolutely an infringement on free speech and freedom of religion for churches. The question is whether, from a court's perspective, this is a justified infringement. The courts examine two questions to make that determination.

1. Is there a compelling interest for the government to act?
2. Are the actions of the government, the least restrictive alternative to accomplish the compelling interest of the government and not unduly infringing on the constitutional rights of the citizens?

The argument is that the current health crisis facing our nation does constitute a compelling interest. Second, are these mandates the least restrictive option, or are there less restrictive alternatives available? At this time, this question cannot be fully determined due to the continued rapid spread of the virus, and judges will not want to place people at risk. The NCLL will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Factors to Consider

1. **What is legally required in my state?** This is important to ascertain so that your leadership team can understand what is and is not currently allowed. We would recommend following state and local mandates at this time.
2. **What is practically effective for my church?** Can your church provide online alternatives? Can you do house meetings of smaller groups? Can your church meet in smaller numbers on a rotating schedule? These questions should be assessed by your church or ministry leadership to best position your church during this time. What type of gathering that will be able to be used will be based on your state and local mandates in place? See ncll.org/covid-19 for the complete updated list.
3. **What are the community optics for my church?** Once your decision is made, your church needs to understand the community view of that decision. It is important for us to be leaders in our communities at this time. Many are fearful for their loved ones with the spread of this virus.

How should my church respond?

If your state is under a legal mandate, we would recommend full compliance at this time. Contact our office for specific recommendations for your state.

Things we know about the virus:

1. This is a highly contagious virus that has demonstrated a high level of communicableness in foreign countries and now the US
2. This virus tends to be more dangerous to older people and those with weakened immune systems.
3. Social distancing is intended to limit the volume of individuals needing medical care, so it does not overwhelm health care services.

Things we do not know about the virus:

1. At this time, it is unclear how long the disruption of daily life will be.
2. There is not a firm understanding of when normal church and ministry operations should be resumed across the country.
3. Government recommendations and restrictions are in place for now until further notice. There has been mention of perhaps six to eight weeks, but much is still unknown.

A couple of questions that we have received:

1. ***Can we meet around the building in smaller groups?*** If your state has a mandate in place, this would still potentially be a violation because of common areas like restrooms, parking lots, and foyers.
2. ***Can we meet in the parking lot? Drive-in Church?*** Yes, this is acceptable. The technical part would be the only challenge, but if the technology is in place, this would be a great alternative. If your state has a stay-in-place mandate, please contact our office for clarification for your county or state.
3. ***Can we meet more often in smaller groups?*** Yes, this is an acceptable arrangement based on the number meeting. There are also alternatives using Zoom and other video conferencing technology.
4. ***If our church chooses to disobey government recommendations, what might happen?*** In several states, there could be criminal consequences.
5. ***Is it advisable to reduce services and outreaches?*** At this time, we would advise churches to cancel all outreaches, events, and activities.



6. How do we collect our church's finances if we cannot take offerings? We would recommend online options for members. They can also drop checks off at the church in a dropbox.

7. How do we minister during this time? While we are dealing with the challenges of social distancing, this will provide an opportunity for prayer, additional Bible study, and discussions about eternal things over the phone and online during this time. Many without Christ are going to be battling depression and cabin fever. Take the time to call your lost friends and be a voice of hope and encouragement, and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

At The National Center for Life and Liberty, we want to support you and your ministry/church during this time. If you have any questions or concerns about any of the material above, please contact us by phone at 888-233-6255 or by email at info@ncll.org. Our team continues to work and will continue to serve you throughout this crisis.

Thank you for your ministry in the Lord. God bless you as you continue to serve Him.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David C. Gibbs III". The signature is written in a cursive style.

David C. Gibbs III

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