



COVID-19 WHEN SHOULD OUR CHURCH BEGIN MEETING IN OUR BUILDING AGAIN?

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Many have reached out to the National Center for Life and Liberty to ask the question, “When should our church begin meeting in our building again?” This question is on the mind of many pastors and church members. The assembling of ourselves together is a command of Scripture that we have historically enjoyed without question in the United States. During the COVID-19 crisis, however, many states and localities have asked or forced churches not to meet in their buildings. As we are now in the fourth week of quarantine across the United States, and Easter Sunday is past, many church leaders want to know when to start planning to re-open church campuses.

On March 17, we published a video that discussed how pastors should respond. We mentioned that we would be monitoring through March and into the early part of April. At that time, there were only several thousand confirmed cases of COVID-19 in America, and predictions ranged from millions to tens of millions of eventual cases. At this point, we have four weeks of data and can begin to see a clearer picture of what we are dealing with.

What do we know about COVID-19?

1. It is highly contagious. Over half a million cases have now been confirmed in the United States, with New York as the epicenter.
2. Those who are elderly, immune compromised, or have a vulnerable pulmonary system are especially at risk.
3. The rate of death is higher than flu or other typical viruses, but it does not seem as severe as once thought.
4. Predicted fatalities are much fewer than originally projected by the experts.

Pastors, church members, and politicians share a wide range of opinions, ranging from conspiracy theories to anger with those not fully cooperating with state-at-home orders. Several pastors have contracted COVID-19, with documented testimony about how dangerous the virus can be. Other pastors have chosen to continue meeting in person with their congregations.

With such a wide range of responses and an overwhelming amount of information to digest on the subject, the simple question remains: what should my church do? This question cuts through the noise of political implications and the global scene. Pastors want to know how they can best shepherd their people where they are right now. At the NCLL, we do not direct churches or pastors WHAT to do. Our goal as legal professionals is to provide good information to guide your thinking and help you understand your options as you make decisions for your church.

When it comes to the question of what your church should do, there are three main issues to consider

- 1. What is best for my church?** Only you can answer this question. Your church needs to decide what is best for your people. There are always things you CAN do. The question is what is BEST for your church.
- 2. What mandates are in place in my state or locality?** Once you determine what is best for your church, you need to understand any local or state mandates. Understanding these mandates and the consequences associated with them is critical to your decision making.
- 3. What is the best testimony for my church?** Once you determine what is best for your church and any legal ramifications for those choices, your last consideration includes perception in your community. Your church's testimony will have far-reaching effects on your ability to minister into the future.

Once you have considered these questions as a pastor or church leadership team, you need to re-evaluate what you believe to be the best decision for your particular situation. Wisdom in leading during this time is vitally important as many people are frustrated, hurt, angry, depressed, and the list goes on. This is a time when our people need wise, compassionate leadership.

After you have determined what is best for your church regarding meeting in person, we recommend the following:

- 1. Put precautions in place to keep people healthy.** You can access our recommended precautions in our resources section. These precautions are important whether you're doing a drive-in service, meeting in your building, or livestreaming ministry staff.
- 2. Assess the impact of local or state mandates.** Your leadership team needs to be aware of the implications of local and state mandates before, during, and after services.
- 3. Determine your strategy for any fallout.** Before any fallout occurs, determine how you plan to handle the media and law enforcement while shepherding your people through the process. Guard against reactional thinking or responses.

Our office stands ready to support your church as your pastor and leadership team determines what is best for your ministry. We invite you to call our office ahead of time to discuss your strategy so we are best prepared to assist you going forward.

If you determine the best choice for your church is to go against a state or local mandate, we recommend the following steps:

- 1. Document all the procedures you are putting in place to keep your congregation safe.** These procedures should include before-service and after-service building cleaning policies.
- 2. Record events or services, including all safety procedures.** The best evidence is video recording of all safety precautions taken by your church.

- 3. Determine your strategy for any fallout.** If the authorities call or come to the door of your church, do your best to record all interactions with them. This guards against the possibility of any he said/she said moments.

Even after answering the above questions for your particular ministry, some churches still want to know our opinion of when is the best time begin holding services in your church building.

Below are our recommendations based on three factors:

We recommend that churches that want to meet in person and that believe this is the best choice for their church . . .

- in low infection areas, consider around May 17th to begin meeting again
- in medium infection areas, consider around June 7th to begin meeting again
- in high infection areas, consider around July 6th to begin meeting again

At the NCLL, we believe our job is to support your church as your pastor and leadership team make the best decision for your church and the people that God has entrusted to your care. We do not tell churches what to do, but we do want to provide options and advice to assist you in making the best decision. In everything we do and say as believers, we represent Christ. At the NCLL, we believe we are mandated as Christians to take the right stand, the right way, in the right spirit. If we do this in a way that truly honors the Lord, we believe He will take care of the rest.

Our prayers are with every church, pastor, and leadership team as you lead with wisdom during this extremely difficult time. The world has never needed the church more than it does right now. We have the opportunity to demonstrate to hurting people the Hope that is within us. The answer for America is not in the courthouse, the statehouse, or the White House. It is in the church house. Let's make sure the church house continues to be a light in a dark world.

If you have any questions about this material or want to request a coaching session with Attorney David Gibbs III concerning your church's decision, please contact our office at (888) 233-6255 or by email at info@ncll.org.

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