Safely Returning to Worship

Prepare your building
Walk around the property and inside the buildings to check for any safety hazards or concerns. Clean and disinfect your facility thoroughly before opening. Make sure adequate supplies of hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies and disinfectants are available. Post signs regarding new procedures on social distancing, changes to operations and the importance of handwashing.

Maintain social distancing
Arrange worship services to enable six feet of physical separation between persons. This may involve removing or confining off-site. Additional smaller and shorter worship services may be required. Provide for an orderly dismissal of the service to enable social distancing. Additional transition time between services may be required.

Postpone practices that involve physical contact
Implement alternatives to shared activities such as distributing bulletins, passing offering baskets, sharing communion elements and passing attendance pads. Consider temporarily discontinuing coffee or refreshment times and shared meals. Think of creative ways to pass the peace or greet each other without touch such as smiling and waving.

Enhance cleaning practices
Once services resume, establish an enhanced cleaning and disinfecting schedule, including cleaning the sanctuary, restrooms and other rooms after each service. Disinfect common and high-traffic areas as well as any items handled by attendees.

Safeguard older adults and those at high risk
Consider instituting a separate, smaller “service service” for those age 60 and above or those with underlying medical conditions. Limit their volunteer participation to activities that do not involve physical interaction with others.

Protect children, youth and those who work with them
Consider whether to temporarily postpone nursery programs and Sunday School classes. If you plan to continue to offer such services, consider additional safeguards including social distancing with limited class sizes, temperature/symptom screening of children, modified drop-off and pickup procedures, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, and protective equipment for staff and volunteers.

Communication is key
Whatever safeguards are chosen, it is vital to communicate procedures to the congregation, volunteers and staff before the date set for reopening. This can be accomplished through email, social media postings, phone calls and/or automated phone messaging, as well as signs and postings at your facility.