Rockford Region Rebounding
Phase 3: Recovery
Places of Worship

Guiding Principles:

• Response to the COVID-19 pandemic is constantly evolving based on the available information and local disease activity.
• It is important to remember, as places of worship phase into reopening to the public that COVID-19 has not been eradicated and that hygiene best practices and social distancing practices must be maintained in order to help prevent a resurgence in new COVID-19 cases from occurring.
• This guidance was developed as part of the Rockford Region Rebounding efforts, and has been prepared by an interfaith workgroup comprised of leadership from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Unitarian faith communities, in conjunction with the guidance of the WCHD.
• Our ministries and our faith communities are essential. How we live those ministries and tend to our communities must be flexible, creative, faithful, and center on our love for one another.
• Religious communities have persisted and adapted through numerous past disruptions, including pandemics, persecutions, wars, and technological changes, and with thoughtful perseverance we will survive the COVID-19 pandemic. We offer our caution, courage, and blessings to all siblings in this work.
• We grieve not being able to worship, celebrate, and mourn in person as such gatherings are sacred and holy to our faiths. We acknowledge that gathering in person to worship will require onerous work and will involve many limitations.
• Faith communities throughout Winnebago County will continue to adhere to the Restore Illinois, Executive Orders, and guidance/rules issued by the Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
• Places of Worship must comply with all applicable local municipal ordinances.

Expectations of Places of Worship

• Post signage at seating entryway stating individuals should not enter with a fever, symptoms of COVID-19 or close contact to a confirmed case of COVID-19. Most common signs of illness are fever over 100°F, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, body aches, sore throat, recent loss of taste or smell.
• Provide hand sanitizer at entries of worship spaces and restrooms.
• Either close restrooms, or use a one-in, one-out rule for use.
• Sanitize open restrooms on an hourly basis.
• All individuals over the age of 2 years who can medically tolerate it, should wear a facial covering if attending a physical gathering.
• Since singing can spread droplets up to 26 feet, groups of singers or choirs are not permitted at this time.
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- Individuals attending services gathered in a physical should not sing together. Use pre-recorded music.
- If a service is being recorded/televised, provide as much space as possible for the cantor/singer.

- For children and youth
  - Congregations should follow the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for childcare programs.
  - Move programming to outside spaces as much as possible.

On-Line Worship Service Considerations
- Group size should be limited to no more than 10 people in one remote location.
- Individuals should be separated by six (6) feet apart unless they are members of the same household.
- Microphones should not be shared.
- Provide 26 feet of space around anyone singing.

Physical Gathering Worship Service Considerations
- Outside physical gatherings are preferred.
- Individuals can provide their own camp or folding chair and be seated a minimum of 6 feet apart unless they are part of the same household.
- Facial coverings/mask should be encouraged by all individuals over the age of 2 years of age who can medically tolerate.
- For congregations without lawns, consider use of outdoor space with the Rockford Park District.
- Drive-in services are permitted with cars separated by one parking space on both sides.
- Microphones should not be shared.
- Vulnerable individuals must be discouraged from physical gathering for their own safety. This includes individuals who:
  - Are age 65 years or older
  - Who have chronic medical conditions including heart, lung, kidney, diabetes
  - Who have compromised immune systems
- Indoor seating capacity should not exceed one person for every 113 square feet per individual. Each household member sitting as a group will add 25 square feet to this requirement.
- Avoid the use of any shared items such as hymnals, offering plates/baskets, bulletins, etc.
- Remove all shareable items from the worship space.
- Disinfect worship space between services.
- Clean and disinfect restrooms hourly. Maintain cleaning logs visible to the patrons.

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• Ensure that soap dispensers and paper towels are monitored and stocked on an hourly basis during restroom checks.

• Overall nightly cleaning and disinfection should be done in the morning to give airborne particulate matter time to settle (a minimum of 3 to 4 hours).

Appendix 1: Detailed Procedures

Preparation/Planning
• Assess physical layout of facility as well as demographics and needs of the congregation and staff to best understand risks and to inform re-opening plan development.

• Identify/prepare a team to lead re-opening efforts

• Identify/assign a liaison or point of contact to communicate with the WCHD and other entities as necessary.

• Coordinate training for staff and volunteers

• Identify maximum capacity of your facility; make assessments as to how many congregants may gather during different stages.

• Develop isolation protocols should congregants become ill during services.

• Determine what actions will be taken, and by whom, to address any issue of non-compliance by attendees.

Facilities
• Deep clean the entire facility prior to re-opening.

• Inspect and perform any needed maintenance on all building mechanical systems, air flow is critical, so ensure HVAC (if present) systems are functioning at maximum levels. Introduce fresh air through systems if possible.

• Ensure the safety of building water systems and devices after a prolonged shutdown. Flush all toilets and run hot and cold water outlets for five to ten minutes

• Ensure water heater is properly maintained and the temperature is correctly set.

• Ensure hand sanitizing stations are set up at all entrances near restrooms, and other locations throughout the building as may be appropriate.

• Clearly mark one-way circulation routes if it is possible to do so.

• Close any rooms or spaces where people do not need to be present.

• Identify and mark multiple entrances and exits to avoid bottlenecks and facilitate one-way circulation.

Communication
Communicate re-opening plans and protocols through all available means including mailings, newsletters, phone calls, websites, and social media postings. Be sure to communicate to the public as well as your own members.

Prominently post CDC, DCEO, IDPH, or WCHD guidance publications at entrances and other areas of high visibility.

Ensure that greeters are able to inform the congregation on the policies and procedures in place during this time.

Equipment

- Procure PPE for all staff and volunteers, including masks (face coverings) gloves, and hand sanitizer.
- Procure face coverings for distribution to congregants who do not bring them.
- Ensure sufficient supply of cleaning products and disinfectant, there will be a lot of cleaning going on, after every service and throughout the week.
- Provide secure container for individuals to place offerings.
- Remove all hymnals, bulletins, envelopes, visitor’s forms and similar items from the seating areas, and be prepared to project or go without these things.

Resumption of In-Person Worship

Note: After taking into account the above expectations (regarding capacity, vulnerable persons, singing, masks, cleaning, etc.), you should also be prepared to:

- Have ushers or volunteers seat congregants from the front of the facility to the rear, and dismiss from rear to front upon conclusion of services. Unfortunately preferred seating locations will not be permissible during this period.
- Attempt to maintain one way circulation throughout the facility at all times.
- Ensure a physical separation of 6’-0’ between family units within any given row.
- Maintain two empty rows in between each seated row (use only every third row)
- Eliminate the practice of any physical interaction between worshipers, including greetings, holding of hands, and exchanges of peace.
- Greeters do not shake hands, ever.
- Refrain from passing collection baskets or plates, make provisions for congregants to place offerings in a secure box or basket as they exit the building
- Eliminate communal gathering in advance of or following services (no coffee or doughnuts)
- Prop doors open and open windows if possible to allow maximum introduction of fresh air and air flow.
• Discourage the use of restrooms, or establish for emergency use only. Develop a plan for usage limiting the number of people that may enter a restroom facility and enforcing social distancing in any lines that form. A "one-out, one-in", rule is recommended.
• Clean and disinfect the facility thoroughly after each and every service, especially high touch surfaces and items such as door handles, light switches, and restrooms if in use.
• As you CELEBRATE the return of your congregation, remember that - unless you wait until Phase Five, many of your people cannot be with you in person. How do you celebrate in a way that includes them?

Additional Suggestions You May Consider
• Offer more services with fewer attendees if possible.
• Encourage continued on-line worship, and communicate that at home worship is valued.
• Keep a record of service attendees complete with contact information should there be a need for contact tracing.
• Congregations which celebrate communion should follow the guidelines of their faith community.
• Consider suspension of playing any wind instruments.
• Take care not to light candles immediately after using an alcohol based disinfectant or hand sanitizing gel.

References
Georgia Baptist Ministry Board. [https://gabaptist.org/reopening-your-church-building/](https://gabaptist.org/reopening-your-church-building/).
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.  
https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/Pages/RestoreILP3.aspx


Winnebago County Health Department. www.wchd.org.