

**Returning to Church**  
**A Conversation with Rev. Kerri Parker, Exec. Dir of the WI Council of Churches**

Once the decision is made to begin worshipping together in a congregant setting, keep in mind that this will take time. We are talking about a 12-18 month timeframe. Until a vaccine is found, the virus will remain among us. *Remember that it is very contagious, very dangerous for the elderly and those with underlying conditions, and that most of us still have no immunity to it. In Wisconsin, that vulnerable population is about 50% of the state.* The "Badger Bounce-Back" will kick into gear when we have seen 14 days of steadily improving numbers in infections and deaths, and when we have sufficient capacity in supplies, tests, and contact tracing to contain future waves of infections that are likely.

**No matter what phase of recovery we are in, everyone must continue to emphasize caution, prudence, social distancing, hygiene, and testing for everyone who is symptomatic or been in contact with an infected person. No let-up.**

**Phase 1:** Possible by the end of May. Restrictions will still be for groups of 10 or less. Recommend that as many parishioners as possible who are comfortable with at-home services continue to worship apart. For those who wish to meet together, the challenge will be to keep within small group limits, as well as still minimize contact. Masks, gloves, sanitizer and other protective gear should be used, and provided at the worship site if worshippers do not have them. Remember that the pastor becomes the most at-risk person in these small, multiple setting accommodations.

**Phase 2:** May be possible 1-2 months after phase 1 if trends continue to improve. Health officials will continue to evaluate the safety measures every 2-3 weeks. Up to 50 people may gather at this point, with proper safety measures observed.

**Implications for church:**

**Should continue any distance ministries that have been set up. Keep people socially distanced within sanctuary or gathering place. If you worship more than 50 in a service, consider multiple services and reservations to prevent a surge at any one service. Ideally, there would be at least three hours between services to allow the virus in aerosol form to settle and become less effective. No physical contacts. No sharing of food, drink, offering plates or other materials. Wear protective gear as much as possible.**

- **Minimize public talking and singing.** Talking produces 10X the aerosols that comes from breathing alone (without coughing or sneezing). Singing produces 60X the aerosol volumes, as do wind instruments. Suggest recorded music, off-site small group performances, or organ or piano music only, all with out singing. Also minimize talking of liturgy, public prayers, etc.
- **Do not share the peace** except by signed greeting, no handshakes or elbow bumps.
- **Ask that people not crowd** the halls, doorways, or stairs coming or going. Keep a six-foot distance between individuals or small family groups. Also do not congregate in small groups in the parking lot or off-site.

- **Do not pass an offering plate.** If people pick up bulletins or letters, spread them out ahead of time and emphasize that they should only touch what they intend to take.
- **Any use of a public bathroom should be limited and controlled,** Usher or attendant limits when people go in, require hand washing and no touch of common surfaces, and be prepared to wipe down faucet handles, door handles, etc.
- **Large group gatherings should continue to be postponed,** other events such as confirmation, first communion, etc. can be spaced out in the schedule to one or two families only or postponed as well.
- **Be open to options,** when and how to have services, offer parishioners choice within reason and with safety.
- **Communion; no common cup or reusable cups.** Use disposable individual cups, set up cups and wafers on small individual plates to further reduce contact with pastor and attendants. Screen and protect preparers. Space out communicants in lines or around presentation points.
- **Have extra masks, gloves, sanitizer for parishioners on site.** Offer proper and convenient disposal accommodations.
- **Don't forget your shut-ins.** Contact them by phone, through family or by friends, and offer safe communion if at all possible. Do not endanger them or yourselves in the process.