

April 2020

# We Shall Meet Again

*A discussion of the issues related to churches meeting “in person” once again in South Carolina*

As we prepare to re-convene church gatherings in the wake of COVID-19 there are many issues to consider both for congregations and the communities they are seeking to reach for Christ. The following are points for prayerful consideration.



**PALMETTO FAMILY**

## **UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE MANDATES FROM THE GOVERNMENT MEAN FOR CHURCHES AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES AND HOW WE SHOULD HANDLE THIS INFORMATION**

- The mandates/restrictions from the SC Governor's Office were, in large part, not meant for churches
- Churches were deemed "Essential"; thus, they could carry on with ministry as they saw fit
- Most Churches took the "Good Neighbor" approach and moved their gatherings from in-person worship to online gatherings & teleconference solutions (we are not advocating one approach over another, see below)

### **IMPORTANT FACTORS TO REMEMBER**

- While we are all in this together, your church or ministry culture is unique (there will be no "One-size-fits-all solution")
- While you will consider so much information and the many opinions, you and your leadership know your church culture the best
- When making decisions on church and ministry reopening, following the leading of the Holy Spirit is crucial

### **SOME MEASURES TO CONSIDER AS YOU WORK THROUGH THE PROCESS OF "RE-OPENING" YOUR MINISTRY**

- Consider a "Launch Date" (hard open) to re-open or make your facilities available for in-person worship in an "unofficial" gathering to start with, and moving toward an organized "official" gathering (soft open)
- Consider an escalated or phased process to re-opening (from more restrictive to less)

## **BECAUSE OF YOUR UNIQUE CHURCH CULTURE, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND THOUGHTS AS IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION AND NOT A RIGOROUS CHECKLIST OF "DO'S AND DON'TS"**

**1 Gathering Size and "Social Distancing"**  
Many churches won't have to concern themselves with hundreds or thousands of people in their gatherings. But as we begin this process, what steps will you take to keep your gatherings "socially distant?" Will you remove rows of chairs or block off pews? Will you limit seating arrangements to "families only"? Will you create additional service times to accommodate more people gathering in fewer numbers? How will you handle Sunday School, Small Groups, or Life Groups during your reopen? Will you put them on hold initially? Will you limit the size? Will you go to a "Worship Hour Only" structure for in person worship initially? Will you allow more time in between services to sanitize and disinfect surfaces and worship space? Will you create a "seniors and vulnerable only service" (don't call it that!) to create a safe environment for those who are most vulnerable to contracting Covid-19?

### **2 Social distancing and Personal Protection Equipment requirements**

As members and guests alike re-enter your church facilities, how will you handle their interaction and their feeling of safety? Will you require no physical contact (handshakes, hugs, etc.)? Will you create more floor space in all gathering spaces by moving objects to allow for the "6 feet rule"? Will you restrict "stage space" to a certain number of people for worship times (worship teams and choirs)? Will you suspend or do away with altogether your "Meet and Greet" (hand shaking) time? How will your Greeter or Door

Holder ministry be affected? Will you require door holders at entries, bathrooms, and worship center doors? Will you require all who enter your facilities to wash or sanitize their hands? Will you require all who enter your facility to wear a mask? Will you take extra steps and measures to sanitize and disinfect your facility before reopening? Will you continue to take those additional measures between gatherings?

### **3 Services that normally require contact**

Many of the vital parts of our ministry that we have practiced in the past were done with a great deal of physical contact. Some of these services are vital to the church, some are good ideas, and some are ancillary in nature. How will you conduct church distinctives or sacraments like Communion or Baptisms? How will your collect tithes and offerings? Will you continue to offer coffee and refreshments? Will you have church meals? Will you produce a church bulletin? Will you produce or distribute pre-produced curriculum material? Will you remove pew-back Bibles and Song Books?

### **4 Children's Ministries and Nursery**

Many churches offer children's times of "Junior Church" or Kid's Ministries and nursery. For many families the absence of these ministries will create sizeable obstacles. Will your church cancel children's ministries for a period of time? Will you offer nursery workers? Will you offer a space for families to take children to minimize "distractions"? If you do cancel children's ministries and opt for a true sense of "Family Worship" will you give children's ministry workers the opportunity to share a message tailored to children during your worship time? How will you adjust your message to engage all age groups and attention spans?

**5 Those that can't come or don't feel comfortable**  
There will be those who for various reasons will not return immediately to in person worship services. What steps will you take to reach them? Will you continue your online (live or prerecorded) worship services? Will you make care packs for those who can't gather physically? What contact and follow up methods will you use to ensure maximum connectivity and minimal "back door" loss? How will you handle those with whom you disagree in their reasoning for not returning immediately to in person worship?

### **6 Summer Ministries**

Many churches thrive on summer ministries to motivate, encourage, and revive their members and community. How are you planning for these ministries? Are you cancelling them now? Are you planning on postponing them? Will you lose deposits on campgrounds or lose money on VBS curriculum and supplies? Is it too soon for you to know what to do yet?

### **7 Special Events**

Some churches and ministries already have a calendar full of special events. Engaged couples have planned a summer wedding; your church has Homecoming or a Fall Revival; you will be called upon to provide a funeral service for a member or family member. How will you handle these situations? Will you handle them case-by-case or create a temporary policy to fall back on?

### **8 Attendance and Giving?**

Many churches track their attendance numbers and measure growth and effectiveness based on their tracking. All "nonprofit" ministries and churches rely on faithful giving from their donors and members. How will you view your numbers? Will you consider your growth track in a separate

category during the initial phases of reopening? How will (how have) you handle(d) a decline in giving? Does your church currently have an online giving solution? What steps will you take in to limit spending or curb your budget to adjust to a decrease in giving?

## 9 Your Church and the Community

During the Covid-19 crisis, the community that surrounds your church needs your church to be the Body of Christ. The “Hands and Feet” of Jesus. How are you adjusting now to meet the needs of your community? Are you creating new budget lines or special funds to help with the “met needs” of members or the people of your community? Are you offering special counseling times (in person, over the phone, or webcom) to help with mental health, emotional support, addictions, and spiritual well-being? What are you doing (or planning to do) for outreach? Are you still visiting sick at home or in the hospital? Have you participated in any community prayer gatherings?

## 10 The New Normal?

As we continue to forge ahead into the unknown and as we transition back to in person worship, are you preparing your church for a “New Normal”? Do you anticipate that your church or ministry will someday soon or the distant future return to what it once was? Are you preparing yourself for the great likelihood that our churches and ministries may be permanently affected by this season of transition? How do think God is using this time to help you and your ministry? What changes are you making in your personal life and in your leadership strategies to lead the church into tomorrow and a “new normal?”

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Once again, this list of discussion points is not meant to be exhaustive in nature nor is it meant to suggest a “plug and play” solution for every challenge you will face. We are not suggesting a specific time for you to begin meeting for in person worship, nor are we placing a burden of guilt on your shoulders. This list of questions is meant to promote and encourage thought and dialogue within the Nehemiah Network, local pastors, Church Leadership Teams, and the church or ministry you lead.

We know that uncertainty looms in the days ahead. Understandably, there are questions you are asking yourself as you read this sentence to which you still haven’t an answer. It is our Hope at Palmetto Family and the Nehemiah Network to equip you with tools necessary for ministry. We want to be on the leading edge of the battle culturally, but also provide ourselves as a valuable resource to you and your ministry. We want to encourage you, engage you, and equip you to be Light Warriors for Jesus Christ in your church and in South Carolina. During this time of transition, we want you to know that you can count on us to be a steady frontline presence in the spiritual battle that is being waged every day. We also want you to know that you can count on us to provide resources for you to carry the Gospel of Christ to your church and community.

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