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**Permission given to multiply this special issue of hope and opportunities for spiritual growth**

## **Reopening Church, Post-COVID-19: Focus on What You Can Do, Not What You Can't**

Many congregational leaders are asking our Church Doctors about logistical issues to reopen worship. We are not physicians, so don't treat this as medical advice. Consider these as creative ideas.

Don't get hung up by concentrating on what you can't do. Focus on what you can do. Avoid influence by the negative: "But we've always done it this way." Hey, it's just temporary (we pray!), and it's better than nothing.

It is a spiritual discipline to care for your congregation members' health. You can handle snakes to prove God's protection if you really want to, but it's not the best way to attract newcomers!

### **Ten Ideas to Consider**

1. For social distancing purposes, offer extra worship services at new times, on different days, and during evenings, along with your normal times for worship. Ask families to "register" by text, email, or phone. Yes, it's extra work for worship leaders and pastors. Remind everyone: (1) It's only temporary, and (2) be positive—you may discover a new time slot that increases attendance for newcomers. Also, (3) ask members to invite unchurched friends who are likely more receptive due to all the challenges we face right now.

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2. Prepare announcements carefully. Avoid the line of thinking, “This is the new normal.” Mental health experts say it has a negative impact on people. In truth, no one knows. Focus on how great it is to get back to worship together!
3. Train cheerful greeters to (verbally) greet people outside the building to avoid lines and respect social distancing. If it’s raining, greeters should use umbrellas—not cancel the greeting!
4. Provide a table at all entrances with hand sanitizer and masks available.
5. Add some volunteer restroom attendants to clean and sanitize the facilities before, during, and after each worship service. Let people know you are providing this precaution by using a sign on the restroom door.
6. If your church has a tradition of greeting one another during worship, modify it for now. Ask people to turn on their cell phones. Suggest they text one another.

Then, add a mission and outreach phase: Ask them to look at their contact list, pick someone who is unchurched, and send them a text like: “Hi! I’m in church having a wonderful time. Have a great day! God loves you, and we love you.”

Bring hope to people at a time when so many feel hopeless. Don’t forget to reach out to those who are shut-ins, as well.

To greet one another during the worship service, orchestrate a time to wave. If you are streaming the service, turn the camera on the crowd and instruct everyone to wave, simultaneously greeting those watching with an orchestrated, chaotic love cheer.

7. If you provide a children’s message, consider having the children stand at their seats or stand in the aisles by the row where they are seated.
8. For the collection, provide several boxes scattered in the hallways for people to drop in their offering on their way in or out of worship.
9. The Lord’s Supper: If your church celebrates communion, you’ll likely need to make some temporary changes to keep people socially distanced and safe. (It amazes us, how some “theologians” and denominational leaders get hyped about this. Look, if Jesus could turn water into wine, it’s likely He can make this happen!) Consider handing out the bread and wine/grape juice in little packets. Provide tables so people can take one on the way into church. Have a sign, “For the Lord’s Supper in Worship.” Then, at the time you have the Lord’s Supper, just do what you usually do, except people don’t leave their seats.
10. For “fellowship” after church, set up refreshments at various “stations” inside and out (weather permitting). Provide coffee and other drinks in throwaway cups. Use juice boxes, bottled water, etc. Those serving should wear masks and rubber gloves.
11. Don’t stop livestreaming or recording services. Keep it up! Now that you’ve made the leap into using technology, refine it—don’t stop it. Several churches have actually increased “attendance” through livestreaming. Extend your outreach.
12. As you livestream, make sure you have flowers or some colorful banners in the screenshots. If you have to keep the camera focused on one place, make sure you add some colorful flowers so people can “see life” and church “in color.”

## Afterthought

If you have been livestreaming your worship services and discovered you are reaching some people who were previously unreached, consider this: What if you realized it has become beneficial as an outreach mechanism, attracting some who are interested, or new believers, but they don't have a church? What if you realize it has been beneficial to those who are permanently shut in?

Now that you know how to do it and have developed a system, consider continuing it. However, for those who are not shut in, add a regular offer for someone from the church to "drop by" and provide a gift, like a modern translation of the Bible, along with a homemade pie, or cake, or whatever.

You might wonder: Why not invite them to attend worship at church? Look, people are not stupid. If they feel the urge to come to your church, they can easily find it. However, Jesus' approach is to "Go," in the discipling formula. Believe and follow His plan, and you will discover it works much better. And, you should not be surprised!

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