

# Mayor Johnson's Faith Leaders' Task Force

## *Reopening Recommendations*



### **TASK FORCE REPRESENTATIVES:**

Dr. Lawton Davis, Coastal Health District Director  
Pastor Thomas Sills, Connor's Temple Baptist Church  
Rev. Billy Hester, Asbury Memorial United Methodist Church  
Rev. Lolita Hickman, Trinity Baptist Church  
Imam Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, Masjid Jihad  
Rabbi Robert Haas, Congregation Mickve Israel

The following recommendations are based on CDC Guidelines for Faith Based Organizations, the three online Mayor Van Johnson led clergy discussions, and the views of the above listed task force.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is the recommendation of this Task Force that houses of worship remain closed for worship services at this moment in time. According to the CDC, "Any type of gathering is now a risk—there is no way to have an in-person worship service in a zero-risk environment." Let us also remember that there is still a shelter-in-place order for all individuals in Georgia at a high risk for severe illness from COVID-19. If a majority or even a minority of our congregants fall into this category, it would not be advisable to ask them to violate the executive order by gathering when they are supposed to be sheltering at home.

We also believe discussions concerning the restarting of live worship services should not ensue until:

1. A vaccine becomes available; or
2. There is a drastic plummet in the number of cases in our area, according to the CDC.

In the absence of services at houses of worship, we suggest that these houses of worship adopt strategies for online services. These online options include streaming and conference calls on platforms such as: Zoom, Youtube, Facebook, and other such sites, with each congregation determining its own protocols.

We also believe that congregational leaders should stress the positive aspects of their online services. For instance, congregations now have more worship options via online services than ever before. Out of towners as well as homebound individuals will have the option of viewing worship services. Such services may even inspire nonmembers to join the congregation, and people who are usually reticent to attend such services may now decide to view them from the comfort of their own home. We also suggest congregations set up phone access options for congregants unable to view the service online and perhaps other creative worship modes such as drive in services. We recommend that clergy members and lay leadership stay in touch with their members by continually calling them as well as by providing other venues to stay in touch such as videos on their Facebook pages and websites and even creating 24 hour a day encouraging word messages.

## **FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Understanding that such technology may pose a certain amount of technical and financial difficulty for both houses of worship and their individual members, we advise that both congregations and our Savannah community take actions to assist everyone in this endeavor. We should search for ways to fund the training of our members in these new technologies and to search for grants and loans to help houses of worship purchase laptops and other devices. We might even see if we could possibly team with TV stations to give clergy members from smaller congregations the option of delivering a comforting message.

## **CONCLUSION**

We know that all of us would prefer to return to our normal modes of worship, but we must be careful in risking the lives of any of our members, especially the most vulnerable ones. Additionally, the price of returning to services may be far more than we expect. What happens if a person has a coughing fit? What happens when 80 year-old members decided to return, knowing full well that they represent the most vulnerable members in the community? Will not services be continually disrupted by these events, or by when attendees forget to sit six feet away from each other? How will choir members or musicians play in this atmosphere? Also, six feet apart remains a recommendation for usual daily events; for worship services, the recommendation is actually 30 feet apart because of the amount of singing and speaking involved.

Worship services continually and consistently rank as one of the venues which is most susceptible to the spread of COVID 19, and we highly recommend that congregations wait to return to in-house services until a safe time ensues in the future.

## **PROTOCOL FOR EARLY REOPENING**

However, if congregations wish to open against our recommendations, we hope they will follow the following protocols recommended by the CDC, the Mayor Johnson Virtual Clergy Discussions, and this Task Force.

1. Require everyone to wear masks.
2. Provide ample amounts of hand washing and hand sanitizing stations and protective masks.
3. Check to see if the city or county can offset some of the monetary expenses by providing sanitizing stations, masks, and other necessities.
4. Limit choirs to use of soloists. Have soloists sing at the other side of the sanctuary from the musicians.
5. If a choir is used, please encourage physical distancing.
6. Have every pew marked off six feet apart for "distance spacing" and leave every other row vacant. If people are from the same family, they may sit together without distance spacing.
7. Think about outdoor services.
8. Refrain from any handshaking.
9. Post signs "No Handshaking, Hugging or any other Physical Contact in the building."
10. Invest in spraying machines that clean.

11. Prop open doors to improve air turnover time for ambient air.
12. Allow only one entry door.
13. Measure the temperature of everyone entering the sanctuary, using digital thermometers, which do not need to touch the individual.
14. Determine if there are nurses in your congregation who are available to take the temperature of congregants before they enter building. If not, make arrangements for persons who are trained, or qualified, to take temperatures. If a temperature is above 100.4 degrees, the congregant can wait 15 minutes and have it taken again. If it remains high, the individual should not be allowed in the building.
15. Allow plenty of time between services to air places out.
16. Use paper towels instead of dryers (which spread germs quickly).
17. No more than one person should be allowed to use a restroom at a time, and its cleanliness should be maintained after each use.
18. Post signs to wash hands before leaving restroom.
19. Remove Bibles, hymnals, and any materials from pew racks and pews before anyone enters the building.
20. Have congregants sign a legal waiver before entering the building. If they do not or refuse to sign, they are not allowed in the building.
21. Check with your insurance carrier to insure you are covered by the waiver.
22. Do not prepare a printed bulletin. If a house of worship has screens, put order of service on these screens.
23. Congregants should be notified before re-opening as to what has been done to prepare to re-open, such as, the sanctuary has been sanitized, distance spacing enacted, masks provided, sanitizer stations always available. Also inform them that their temperature will be taken, a waiver will need to be signed, and no physical contact will be allowed.
24. No food should be allowed in the building. Water fountains should be disabled and not useable.
25. Alternatives to water fountains, such as bottled water, should be offered.
26. Avoid passing microphone(s) during the service. Service leaders must have a designated microphone.
27. Have locations around the sanctuary where congregants can drop their tithes or contributions instead of a passing a plate.
28. Until a future time, use communion kits rather than the traditional practice. Communion kits can be picked up as congregants enter the sanctuary.
29. Congregants should not come to the altar but pray in their seats.
30. Baptism in the sanctuary must be done with the pastor wearing gloves and a mask.
31. When Baptism in a pool is necessary, special arrangements should be made.
32. Following Benediction, the sanctuary should be dismissed in an orderly way that observes distance spacing.
33. Restrict funeral services to graveside and restrict the number of people in attendance to ten people. Remain physically distant from cemetery workers at all times.