

## Recommendations for Reopening Church Facilities

Conference Office, Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ (HCUCC)

### Ethical Commitments

Loving our neighbors is an inherent call of the Christian faith. HCUCC member congregations are covenanted to share God's aloha in all circumstances as widely as we can. To enhance our aloha in the time of COVID-19, the HCUCC office understands that those scientists, medical personnel, and crisis managers working for government entities have specialized training and are more informed than the general population on how to manage this crisis. Therefore, the HCUCC office suggests full compliance with all federal, state, and county laws and ordinances in regards to the novel coronavirus and the health of your church.

Respect for one another's well-being forms our ethical compass. At the heart of respect is our ability to take personal *kuleana* and responsibility to keep each other safe and from harm. It is our place as kahu and congregational leaders to guide our congregants into respectful and loving behavior to one another during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Phased Reopening

The HCUCC office recommends congregations plan for a phased reopening of facilities in order to test plans and to ensure protocols are adequate and manageable for larger gatherings.

- Home is safest – communicate to your congregation when it is best to stay home
  - High risk population
  - Sick/living with a person who is sick
  - Dealing with persistent/chronic medical issue
  - Hosting visitors/visiting from off island
- Continue online presence even as facilities open up and activities return to your church campus

### Church Offices

- It is suggested that you open up the office first. If a congregation cannot provide for a COVID-19 safe office it is not ready to open up other parts of the facilities:
  - COVID-19 Coordinator
  - Sanitizer
  - Masks
  - Disinfection needs
- Consider appropriate staffing to conduct essential on-campus ministry and administration:
  - What category of risk do staff members fall into
  - Make special arrangements for high risk staff
  - Stagger staff so minimum number of people are on site
  - Close facilities to all non-essential persons
  - For specific suggestions go here: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/reopening-your-church-office/>

### **Preschool/Daycare/Summer Events**

- Work with the Department of Health and check CDC guidelines in order to best manage risks in this ministry. If you operate a preschool, consult with Department of Human Services prior to reopening. All suggestions in this document should be considered in maintaining clean spaces, trained staff, and good operating protocols. For specific recommendations go here: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/essentials-of-child-care-during-an-emergency/>.
- It is recommended that for summer 2020 our churches do not offer or promote in-person group events such as youth mission, Vacation Bible School, adult work groups, etc. Instead, experiment with how these ministries might be handled via an online format.

### **Renters**

- The HCUCB office suggests that you communicate your COVID-19 plans to all rental entities and ask to see theirs. You may wish to delay opening your property until renters can demonstrate reasonable risk management.
- Allow building users/renters to resume operations, with a plan to address cleaning needs and agreement to wear masks and observe gathering and distancing protocols.
- All renters and other third party building users should have a written lease or use agreement requiring use of the facility in a safe manner in compliance with all rules and regulations, allocating the liability in the event of an injury (including sickness), and requiring the user to maintain a policy of liability insurance.

### **Public Worship**

- It is suggested that you begin now to help your congregation understand worship will be different and have a distinctive “not the same” feel to it in a COVID-19 world. Congregants will not be returning to worship that feels familiar to them.
- As the state/counties allow a return to public worship you may wish to continue emphasizing online worship until:
  - Congregation can be oriented as to your church’s plan
  - Church office and ministries are being appropriately managed for COVID-19 realities
- It is recommended that you return to the sanctuary first with live worship streaming as a test of your COVID-19 plans
- Services should be held in church facilities or outdoors only when expressly permitted to do so by state/county ordinances and guidelines, and then only with proper social distancing measures
- Services should be held subject to the strictest hygiene requirements
- Church leaders should provide for:
  - Sanitizers
  - Masks (if required by ordinances/church policy and not brought by participants)
  - Disinfecting of door handles/hand railings before and after services
- Inside the facility or demarcated outdoor worship area the HCUCB office recommends church leaders should ensure that:

- Social distancing is observed between people, whether standing or sitting, of 6 feet in all directions, so that the maximum number of participants can be fixed based on the space available and closed when that limit is reached.
- Places to sit are marked, without separating households,
- Balconies are closed
- Entering and exiting the space are appropriately organized
  - ♣ Forgo receiving lines and receptions
  - ♣ Maintain social distancing
  - ♣ Keep multiple paths of ingress and egress clear to avoid grouping and crowding as congregants enter and depart
- Attendance records are kept so that possible infection chains can be traced
  - ♣ How will you alert congregation if COVID-19 is linked to a participant?
  - ♣ Be prepared for periods of public worship to be interspersed with periods of closed facilities
- Physical touching is avoided (e.g. shaking/holding hands, exchanging hug, etc.)
- The order of service is provided on handouts /bulletins or projected
- There is open, cross ventilation
- Bibles, hymnals, envelopes, pencils, etc. are removed from pews/chairs
- Worshippers forgo the passing of offering plates and instead plates are placed near the exit area for deposits of offerings and tithes
- As congregational singing involves particularly high risks of infection, it should not take place for the time being; the same applies to playing wind instruments.
- Communion services call for particular attention to hygiene; hence, first of all, the reminder that a Service of the Word is not an inferior form of service but opens up the full presence of Jesus Christ to those gathered in the spirit of worship. The HCUCC office recommends forgoing communion for the time being. If communion is celebrated it should be prepared and served with the least amount of hands involved as possible. Bring your own elements?
- Baptisms should be conducted outside the main service and with small groups only for the time being
- Outside the worship space:
  - Verbal and visual instructions for orderly egress to/from worship space that maintains social distancing
  - Count attenders so space might be closed when it is filled to new limits
  - In some circumstances multiple services may be required
    - ♣ Which day
    - ♣ Which staff
  - If you share worship space with other congregations you may need to talk through expectations and new plans for scheduling days and times.
  - Forgo a fellowship hour
  - Forgo nursery – babies stay in worship
  - Continued closed playgrounds

### **Funerals**

- Funerals should be conducted in compliance with the guidance of the funeral directors' understanding of COVID-19 state and county guidelines.
- If a funeral is held in a church facility, the same hygienic safety regulations for funerals should apply as for Public Worship
- Burial services at the graveside should be in harmony with state and county regulations

### **Weddings**

- The same COVID-19 protocols should apply for weddings as for worship services

### **Special Services**

- Confirmations, Ordinations, and other well-attended special services should not be held for the present time being
- Gain experience from your new worship plans
- Should special services take place, the requirements regarding social distancing and hygiene should be applied

### **Faith Formation**

- Sunday school, prayer groups, bible study, etc. should remain online until safety can be regularly and appropriately managed
- Once these activities return to on- and off-campus sites, you should set them up to adhere to your COVID-19 plans
- Once children's activities return to the church campus, you should pair the same children and adults, close shared space areas, stagger drop-off/pick-up, close to all non-essential visitors

**The foregoing suggestions are not intended to be a complete or definitive list of all things to be considered and addressed as your church reopens. You are strongly encouraged to consult Department of Health, CDC, and other governmental and health resources as you make your plans to determine the best practice for your church.**