24 More Questions the Church Should Ask Before People Return

On Saturday April 18 I released a blog post with questions for church leaders to consider prior to our state and local governments allowing us to worship again in our buildings. [Click here to jump to that April 18 post.](https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/) The questions on that first post came from conversations I’ve had with leaders from around the country as far west as Hawaii. So far, 600,000 people have viewed the first post in less than a week. We’re all asking lots of similar questions.

I’ve been pondering these and other questions for practical reasons because I serve in a part-time pastoral role at my church and I feel the weight of the decisions that are coming.

I am encouraged by the diversity of the people who have viewed the first post and asked additional questions. Leaders from a variety of denominations have posed great comments and questions: United Methodists, Freewill Baptists, Episcopalians, The Brethren, Independent Baptists, Presbyterians, and Southern Baptists. It’s been a joy to see so many people thinking about best practices for reopening their churches.

As people viewed the first post, they began asking questions that had not made my initial list. Many of those new questions are on this second list today.

Each congregation will have to arrive at a decision about how they will reopen. All of us want to abide by the instructions from our local, state and national leaders.

That means that congregations will not arrive at the same conclusions about how to reopen. Many things we do in our churches may be similar or exactly the same as we reopen. Depending upon our denominations, our ministry contexts, and what our local authorities allow, other decisions will be more unique. Please be understanding if churches in your area come to different conclusions about what they believe is right in this situation. We’re all making the best decisions we can with the information at hand.

I hope this additional list of questions, when put alongside the first list of 24 questions, will give us plenty to ponder so that we shepherd God’s people well as they come back.

Here we go.

**Question 1: What will you do if your church rents or shares its facilities with outside groups or another church?**A question you’ll have to answer is, “Will we go forward with the shared space arrangement? If yes, who will be responsible for the deep cleaning after each use? Who will bear the expense and responsibility for this?”

**Question 2: What is our responsibility to churches that meet in schools, theaters, or other rented facilities?** Those groups may not be able to return to their rented facilities for a variety of reasons. Should your church consider seeking out one of those “mobile” churches and offering to house them in your facility until they get back on their feet? It would make for good Kingdom partnerships.

**Question 3: How will you handle decision counseling and the altar call/invitation at the end of your worship service?**Your church may not have this tradition, so it could be a non-issue. In many churches, though, it is possible that individuals and/or families walk to the front of the worship center, talk with the pastor, and announce a decision to follow Christ or ask to officially join the church family. I’ve preached a sermon and led an invitation in which people left their pews to come to the front and make spiritual decisions. I’ve placed my hand on people’s shoulders, leaned in close to hear them talk, and this won’t fit in the new six-foot distancing standards today.

**Question 4: Should you have new plans to meet the financial needs of members, guests, and the community at large?**COVID-19 is going to provide churches with new ways to meet needs in practical ways. Will you need to recruit new people to benevolence ministries? Start a backpack drive for kids going back to school in August? Is it time to begin a food pantry? What about financial counseling to families who are facing financial hardships because of furloughs and layoffs?

**Question 5: Who will enforce physical distancing policies and cleaning practices?**In the back of my mind I can see Barney Fife running around the church blowing a whistle. But if you have new rules, someone is going to have to remind congregants about keeping others safe. Will this be a person or a team of people? Or will you have this at all?

**Question 6: How will you minister to senior members who are concerned about returning?** Many of them do not have internet access. They don’t have computers, Apple watches, iPads, or smartphones. If they are slow to return, how can we help them re-engage with their fellow senior members? Would you see any benefit in beginning a special worship service just for them? Local businesses have instituted “senior hours” and open early to these people before the general public is allowed in. Perhaps a new kind of worship service just for them would help seniors be safe, feel safe, and reconnect (at a safe distance!) to their friends whom they may not have seen for months.

**Question 7: Will Bible study groups be encouraged to stay online?** I hope the answer to this is a resounding “yes.” Bible study groups can broadcast live via Zoom or Facebook live directly from inside their classrooms. This can reach absent group members, people who are intentionally going to delay returning, and people who are online and looking for a virtual group.

**Question 8:  What are you going to do if physical distancing fails and we see a flareup of COVID-19?**It may be a good idea to have a “plan B” should our governors or mayors have to ask us to shelter in place again because of a return of COVID-19. People may let their guard down, feeling like the threat has passed. How quickly will you be able to go from on-campus to off-campus groups, and from worship on campus to worship online again?

**Question 9: When the church returns to the building, will people be asked to wear facemasks? Will the church provide them (or can the church provide them)?**States and local municipalities are going to vary in what they require for larger gatherings to take place. One state I heard of is asking that people wear masks as they return to church; others will follow their example. Will you turn away people who don’t wear one? Will your church be able to find masks to provide them for worshipers?

**Question 10: Does your church need to review its insurance policy to make sure your limits of liability can handle potential lawsuits?**Pastors are asking this question in meetings I’ve attended online. There is a slight concern that a litigious member or guest who contracts COVID-19 might sue the church for allowing people to gather without taking adequate safety precautions.

**Question 11: Have you blocked off pews yet?**In a webinar with leaders from Oklahoma on April 23, I learned their state leaders are requiring every other pew to be closed, and for there to be six feet of distance between people sitting on pews (families can sit together, but there must be six feet of distance between them and the next person). This will greatly reduce the number of people who can attend a worship service. Will deacons or ushers be “pew police” and move people when they sit too close, or sit on a closed row? Some churches that have chairs in their worship center have already begun removing half of them. Another state is asking for six feet of space in front of, to the side of, and behind each worshiper. Listen carefully to the requirements in your area.

**Question 12: Because airborne droplets travel farther when people sing than when they speak, will worshipers be asked to wear masks to reduce transmission?** This is tied to question 9, but is an important one to consider, especially inside the worship center. Several of you have sent me links to articles that document COVID-19 cases in which choirs were thought to be the lead factor in transmitting the disease because of the force of air expulsion.

**Question 13: Should pens and hymnals be removed from the backs of worship center pews?**One reader suggested that we do this to reduce contact with hard surfaces so that COVID-19 is not passed that way. Again, this isn’t a forever decision if you choose to do this. Hymnals and pens can return! Perhaps they never leave, but are wiped down after uses. This will be a big decision in some churches.

**Question 14: Will the financial strain caused by COVID-19 require some full-time pastors to go part-time or become bi-vocational?**I hope it does not come to this. But if offerings are reduced, how will our churches support the people who lead us? How can we minister to our ministers if their work hours at salaries are reduced? In what ways can we encourage the people who lead our congregations? This is a spiritually taxing time for our pastors and church staff leaders.

**Question 15: How will you continue to provide for the needs of groups like MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), a weekday preschool ministry, Mothers’ Day Out, and other non-Sunday gatherings?**Hopefully you will be able to continue facilitating those important meetings, but with physical distancing and safety protocols in place. Will you need additional classrooms? What new procedures do you need to communicate to the participants?

**Question 16: Should you consider installing an air purifier or different kinds of air filters to capture germs?**This was a good question posed by a reader. Upon doing some quick research, there is some merit to this, but it’s not *the* answer. It could be part of an overall strategy. For many churches the expense of this won’t be practical.

**Question 17: How will you move guests from online experiences (worship/Bible study) and into worship and groups on campus – or will you?**Assimilating people has never been a totally easy process. People can take a long time to commit to a group or regular worship attendance. In our new online world of Bible study and worship, what steps will you take to reach out to people and encourage them to connect on campus.

**Question 18: In what other ways will you use Zoom and other online meeting tools now that your church is more acquainted with them?**Have you considered starting or re-starting teacher training using an online tool? It’s convenient, saves people’s time, and allows you to pivot quickly should you need to do some “instant training” when the need arises. Group leaders are now learning how to use Zoom’s breakout room feature (see #21 below).

**Question 19: When adults join an online group, what’s the plan to reduce awkwardness and make them feel welcome?**Would you consider having online “greeters” in groups? These would be members of the group who are charged with the responsibility of spotting new people in a Zoom meeting, initiating a private conversation with them through the Chat tool, and then introducing them to the group at large during an appropriate time in the Bible study.

**Question 20: How will your group leaders take attendance in online groups?**Groups still need to record who is present, because those who are not still need to be contacted. Guests need to be included in your group’s ministry strategy, and you’ll need some basic information about them. How do you capture that now that you won’t have a physical card for them to fill out? Will that be done in a follow-up email or phone call?

**Question 21: How might your online group leaders take advantage of a Zoom feature like “Breakout Rooms”?**If you haven’t used that feature yet, you might want to take a look. You can assign people to virtual rooms in which they can respond to a question, or use it to share prayer requests as a subgroup of your larger online group. No doubt we are going to push Zoom to its limits as we become accustomed to using it. We’ll find new ways of using it that its designers never intended!

**Question 22: What does a virtual invitation look like at the end of a worship service?**How will people respond to the gospel if they are not at the church’s worship service? When we are back in the building, and we have people in the building but others viewing online, how will we give options to the people sitting in their homes who feel drawn by the Holy Spirit to make a response to the gospel or church membership? Will they be asked to call a number where a church member or two are standing by to do phone counseling? Will they be asked to email the church so a minister can make a follow-up call?

**Question 23: What do we do about Mother’s Day, high school graduation/senior recognition, and other special occasions?**There’s no clear option just yet, but you may be able to do something on campus depending upon your community’s guidelines for allowing churches to meet. Some churches are holding virtual high school/senior recognition services. Others are pondering how to honor moms on Mother’s Day, but online. These questions need to be settled very soon.

**Question 24: What is going on. Where’s God in all this?**God is doing great things in His church. That’s what is going on! More people are attending online worship and Bible studies. Mid-week prayer services and Bible studies are being viewed on Facebook Live. The church has learned how to get online within a matter of weeks and has a new ministry sphere in which to reach people. People not connected to the church are hearing the gospel. Folks, it’s not all bad!! God is moving. Let’s move with Him.

I appreciate each of you for the comments, questions, and time you’ve invested in this topic over the last week. We’re better together.

Please share this post in your social media circles like Facebook, Twitter, and more. It’s important that we help one another consider the options before we rush back into “church as usual.” Let’s be thankful we are about to be able to meet together again, but let’s be careful, creative, and caring for the sake of people, and for the sake of Jesus’ name. I don’t want my church to reopen too quickly, have a terrible flareup of COVID-19, and be forever labeled as “that church” that caused a hardship in our community.

Now, before we go, I want you to know that my company, LifeWay Christian Resources, has made quick adjustments to help your church. If you don’t know about the things we are doing for any church, see the links below:

1. [lifeway.com/coronavirus](http://lifeway.com/coronavirus) – a page with links to helpful articles and resources
2. [curriculum.lifeway.com](http://curriculum.lifeway.com/) – my favorite new site! If you are a church that uses LifeWay materials, log in with your church’s credentials and get free access to our ongoing Bible studies in digital form…it will remain free to help churches through the end of May. If you are not a current customer, we still want you to have access, so create a login ID (it’s super fast) and you can have the same free digital Bible studies – for kids, students, and adults! We want to help.

Shoulder to shoulder,

Ken Braddy