



## Frequently Asked Questions on Texas Church Reopening

*(Answers are based on Governor Greg Abbott's "Open Texas" Phase 1, Order GA-21 "Expanding Openings" and Attorney General Ken Paxton's "Third Revised AG Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis – Final"; both posted at [www.uspastorcouncil.org](http://www.uspastorcouncil.org) )*

### **May churches now hold worship services in the church building?**

**YES.** As per the Governor's order GA-14 on April 27, "Essential services" shall consist of everything listed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, Version 2.0, plus religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship."

### **Are churches subject to the 25% capacity limitation related to restaurants, etc.?**

**NO.** These provisions apply ONLY to commercial establishments such as restaurants through Phase 1. Each church's seating capacity is limited only by the individual logistics of your available space using the social distancing guidelines of six feet (or two chairs) in between family units, seating every other row. NOTE: Two or more individuals attending together may sit as a unit.

### **What are the basic guidelines for seating and attendance?**

**IT'S YOUR SPACE** – Guidelines are "Keep at least two empty seats" between family units and "Alternate rows between attendees". You can seat as many in your worship space as can be accommodated using these recommendations.

### **Are facemasks required for congregants, ushers/greeters, worship team, etc.?**

**NO.** Governor Abbott at his press conference on April 27 and Lt. Governor Patrick on the Texas Pastor Council Zoom call on April 28 confirmed that masks are not and cannot be required by county or city government. The guidelines clearly recommend masks be worn in public. Churches, MAY choose to require facemasks be worn at whatever level each pastor decides fits your demographics but again, there is NO local, state or federal requirement.

### **May churches reopen children's church, child care, etc. as well?**

**A QUALIFIED YES.** Due to the continued recommendations to comply with CDC health protocol for any kind of child care for churches and the complexity as well as higher risk factor because of natural logistics of managing small children, most churches who are opening regular services are choosing to two wait until at least Phase 2 or longer to begin any children's on site programs.

### **Are online, outdoor and/or parking lot services still advised?**

OPTIONAL YES. The AG guidelines state that “*Houses of worship should conduct as many activities as possible remotely...*” which include outdoor or drive in services still using social distancing parameters. Each church may choose whether indoor or outdoor at your discretion.

**Why are some churches waiting until June to open while others are opening now?**

CHOICE. All of the current guidelines – NOT mandates – point toward allowing each pastor and church to decide when and in what steps to reopen based on what is best for YOU. Church attendance size, facility size/layout, age and health demographics all as an example are different for every church and should be factored in your decision.

**Should all churches open at the same time as some are saying, i.e. early to mid June?**

CHOICE. There is no “one size fits all” other than the essentials of the faith within the church of Jesus Christ, neither should any pastor feel or be pressured to conform to what other pastors and churches are doing – review previous answer. 😊

**What about senior citizen attendance?**

Very clearly, the most at risk groups for the most severe impact of COVID-19 are the elderly with fragile health and other ages with fragile health and/or at risk health factors. The guidelines urge churches to, “ 1. *Strongly encourage the at-risk population to watch or participate in the service remotely,*” or “2. *Designate an area inside the facility reserved for the at-risk population, or offer a service for at-risk population attendees only.* “

**NEW ITEM:**

**May churches who meet in public schools and have a lease/rental agreement begin meeting in those schools?**

YES. As per Governor Abbott’s **order GA-21, dated May 5**, “*Nothing in this executive order, the DSHS minimum standards, or the joint guidance issued and updated by the attorney general and governor precludes churches, congregations, and houses of worship from using school campuses for their religious services or other allowed services.*”