Recommendations and Considerations
for Outdoor and Drive-In Worship

Many churches are thinking of worship possibilities outside of their sanctuaries as the weather gets nicer. Being mindful that until there is a vaccine there is no way to ensure safety. And remembering that our first concern is to the least of these, the most vulnerable of our communities, here are some things for your church to consider:

DRIVE-IN WORSHIP:

With a substantial enough church parking area a congregation can consider having a drive-in church. Members would sit in their cars, preferably with the windows up to prevent the spread of the virus and listen and participate in the service. The cars could be socially distanced to avoid virus spread, while considering space for emergency movement if need be.

• Before finalizing plans for any outdoor worship it is important to contact, and be in ongoing dialogue with your local Board of Health, police and fire departments concerning local regulations and recommendations.
• Depending on the church membership size and the average number of cars on a typical Sunday, multiple services can be considered. If the average attendance requires more spaces than allowed, members would select their worship hour with perhaps a weekday service included.
• To avoid overcrowding, people planning to attend will register online or by calling an appointed person. Keep a record by date of names, phone and address of all attendees in the event there is a need for contact tracing These records should be maintained for a minimum of 6 months.
• Plan to direct cars to park so all are looking in the same direction. This plan should also include a strategy for entering and exiting the parking lot in an orderly fashion. Deacons, pastor, or other volunteers – with masks – will be ready to direct traffic from a distance of at least six feet. Whenever possible, windows should remain closed to prevent the transmission of the virus.
• Prepare for community safety in the event someone wishing to attend worship has not registered or refuses to adhere to protocols and guidelines.
• Sound systems can be directly linked to cars through cell phones or a low powered FM transmitter (costing approximately $150) which can be used without a license to transmit to a car radio. Alternatively, speaker systems can be strategically placed in the parking area. **It is important to be in touch with local police department regarding regulations.**
• If microphones need to be shared they must be sanitized between each user.
• The area for worship leadership will be placed where all can see from their cars. Walking around during worship is discouraged – leadership should remain at least 6 feet from one another and members of the congregation at all times. Tents can be considered for inclement weather. Appropriate wireless (or wired if necessary) amplification should be sanitized before and after each use.
• Musicians are positioned at least 6 feet from others at all times. Wind instruments are discouraged as the spray from any wind instrument can travel further distances than speaking or singing. Soloists and singers are discouraged at this time, even in outdoor situations.
• Send worship liturgy by email either on Friday or Saturday and make it available online so folks can follow on their cellphones or tablets.
• If severely inclement weather is expected a notification will be emailed, placed on the church website and Facebook page, and perhaps shared through local news stations (much like a snow cancellation.) A backup worship prepared through Zoom or another technology is recommended.
• On communion Sundays, families bring their own bread and grape juice.
• Communicate your worship plans, guidelines for participation as well any cancellation and alternative worship details in advance.

OUTDOOR WORSHIP:

A caution: it will be challenging in an outdoor setting to prevent physical contact. It can be hard for children to not want to run over to a friend. Adults have a challenge with this as well. And in a public venue other people, not connected to the worship gathering, may be wandering around the property. In addition, a simple breeze can carry the virus beyond 6 feet. Leadership should plan to address these concerns in their outdoor worship design and communication.

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• Plan how the space will be laid out, where people will enter and exit, where worship leaders will stand, how those not participating will be encouraged to stay at least 6 feet away throughout the service, especially in a public space.
• Train ushers to direct people to and from their cars, into their seats, toward hand sanitizing stations, etc. Ushers, worship leaders and parking attendants will be trained to direct people toward social distancing.
• Prepare for community safety in the event someone wishing to attend worship has not registered or refuses to adhere to protocols and guidelines.
• Confirm adequate space exists to ensure 6 to 10 feet around participants or participant groups. Family groups may sit together with 6 to 10 feet space around them. These spaces can be marked off in advance.
• To avoid overcrowding, people planning to attend will register online or by calling an appointed person. Keep a record by date of names, phone and address of all attendees in the event there is a need for contact tracing These records should be maintained for a minimum of 6 months.
• Even if a large space is available, small gathering are recommended for the first 2 Phases.
• Masks should be worn at all times by worship leaders and those attending. Hand sanitizer should be made available for use by the congregation. Have hand sanitizer stations. To avoid common touching of surfaces, consider having an usher squirt sanitizer on participants or, ideally, having automatic dispensers if those are available.
• Discourage people from stopping enroute to and from worship, being mindful of local regulations and health care guidelines.
• The area for worship leadership will be placed where all can see. Walking around during worship is discouraged – leadership should remain at least 6 feet from one another and members of the congregation at all times.
• Tents can be considered for inclement weather.
• Appropriate wireless (or wired if necessary) amplification should be sanitized before and after each use.
• Speaker systems will be the best option for outdoor worship. **It is important to be in touch with local police department regarding regulations.**
• If microphones need to be shared they must be sanitized between each user.
• Musicians are positioned at least 6 feet from others at all times. Wind instruments are discouraged as the spray from any wind instrument can travel further distances than speaking or singing. Soloists and singers are discouraged at this time, even in outdoor situations.
• Send worship liturgy by email either on Friday or Saturday and make it available online so folks can follow on their cellphones or tablets.
• Standard worship guidelines for this time are met: no singing, no communion, no collection plate. *(See Recommendations For In-Person Worship)*
• If severely inclement weather is expected a notification will be emailed, placed on the church website and Facebook page, and perhaps shared through local news stations (much like a snow cancellation.) A backup worship prepared through Zoom or another technology is recommended.
• Communicate your worship plans, guidelines for participation as well any cancellation and alternative worship details in advance.

**Many thanks to Bob Naylor for his work on these recommendations and steps. For more information, questions or concerns contact Kelly Gallagher (gallagherk@sneucc.org), Tamara Moreland (morelandt@sneucc.org), or Kate Ostertag (ostertagk@sneucc.org).**