



## Ideas for Regathering Our Churches—Part 2

### Serving Leaders in Ministry

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For more from Dr. Dance, check out his blog: <https://markdance.net/theblog/>

**Pastors:** Two pressing questions are on the minds of pastors and church leaders today:

#### *WHEN and HOW should we regather our people safely?*

The team I serve with in Oklahoma curated ideas from dozens of pastors in order to help us all shepherd our people safely back together.

#### **Continue online services.**

Many churches began online worship and giving for the first time this spring in response to COVID-19. Many were surprised to find that as they reached out to feed their sheep, they noticed a few goats showing up as well!

As a result of COVID-19, the glorious Gospel has been spread from almost every church on almost every digital platform. I suspect that more people heard the *good news* this past Easter than any other time in history.

As this pandemic winds down, I plead with you to ramp up your online presence. Spiritually sick people still need a physician, and many of our elderly people are still advised by medical professionals to indefinitely shelter at home. I can think of no good reason any church should stop reaching saints or sinners online.

#### **Encourage home groups.**

I love to hear about the families who are worshiping together at home. As restrictions lighten, some people are inviting other church families and/or unchurched neighbors to their home on Sundays to share the experience.

You can provide a few simple discussion questions that people can use immediately after they watch the service.





***Pastor, you will not do any of this perfectly, so embrace the messiness of it all and do the best you can. Give yourself some grace up front to make up for those in your church who won't give you any. At least until the fall, get used to making short-term decisions based on the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the counsel of your leaders, and the best interest of your overall church. Thank you for pastoring your people through this pandemic!***

This whole experience should be less than an hour. The experience on the other side of the camera is much different, so please consider less songs and shorter sermons during this temporary season—especially if you want them to discuss components of your sermon.

**Consider outdoor events.** (e.g., drive-in church, outdoor lawn church)

Weather can complicate this idea, but the memories you will make may be worth the effort. Be prepared for the inevitable distractions and complications involved, but there will be more forgiveness in this season than under normal conditions. You may want to try these creative events once, before you commit too far down the road. This is not the time for a picnic, so hold off on meals and make sure you follow current CDC and local guidelines.

**Rotate members in live services.**

To accommodate social distance measures, why not add an extra summer service and invite people by their small groups? A more family-friendly option to consider is using people's last names for rotation. You may or may not need to do this in June, but it will get you through May safely.

**Consider waiting for a "Welcome Back" service.**

Many churches are simply waiting until Phase 3 to regather, which will hopefully be in June. The upside to this strategy is that much more concrete data will be available. This will also ensure more of a reunion experience, as opposed to spreading out awkwardly in sanctuaries.

**Logistical considerations.**

Since the context for each church is unique, so must be the strategy. Regardless of when you gather, here are a few considerations to help you practice safe shepherding:

- Plan how you will limit handouts (e.g., announcements, hymnals, orders of service, and other bulletin information).
- Strategize how to maintain social distance and sanitation requirements with the presence of young children in the worship service.
- Plan how you will clean common areas between services.
- Make masks available and socially acceptable.
- Display signage that would discourage hand shaking, and/or other greetings that require physical touch.
- Identify which doors can remain propped open in order to limit the number of people touching the handles.
- Discuss the possibility of ushering people to appropriate sections or seats.
- Stagger their dismissal to avoid unintentional crowding.

