# Church of the Foothills

# Covid-19 - A Path Through

**June 10, 2020 Version.** Note that this is a “living document” that we expect may change or need continuing updates in coming months as new expert recommendations and “best practices” develop.

**Living in a post Covid 19 world.**

Health care professionals have long been aware of the threats of pandemics. We have seen the impacts of such things as Flu A, Bird Flu, Ebola, SARS and now COVID-19 (Coronavirus). In the last few months, we have experienced the spread of COVID-19. We have seen stories of quarantine, whole communities impacted, cruise ships and stock markets hit hard. We have seen guidance and updates from the State of California, County Health Officers, Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization. This is a new worldwide reality. As a responsible people we must act with plans and projects to restore community worship, serve our community, and contribute to the wellbeing of others.

**Core Principles**

Our Community of Faith recognizes the uniqueness of the Covid-19 pandemic and acknowledges the threats and uncertainties we all face. Decisions we make can have grave consequences to our church body and the community at large. We recognize the diversity of opinion and the collective responsibility to work through the realities of the health threat.

The leadership of the Church of the Foothills establishes the following Core Principles to guide decision making for operations, worship, and facilities usage.

* We will follow the recommendations of the CDC, State of California and the Ventura County Health Department.
* We will be guided by UCC advice for church operations during the pandemic.
* We will set an example of sound collaborative decision making and application of best practices.
* Our most important goal is to protect the health and safety of all who cross our path.
* We recognize the great majority of our congregation and leadership are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and that reopening plans must necessarily reflect this.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Specific Action**

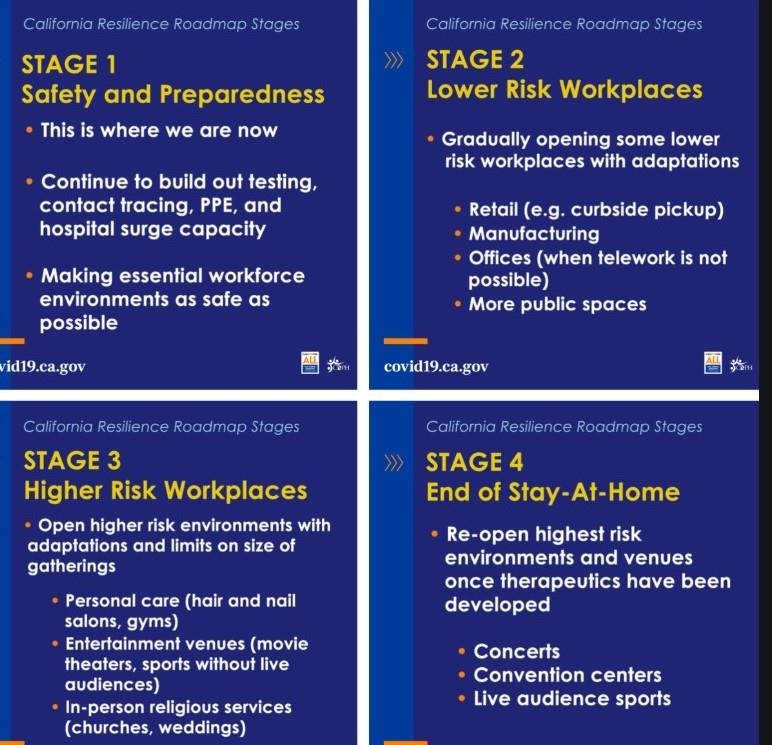
The Church Council shall:

* Adopt response guidelines to maintain and continually improve.
* Establish a (2-3 person) Covid – 19 oversight team which shall ensure “Best Practices”. The Covid oversight team shall recommend operational practices based on current information, serve as liaison with outside regulators and church leaders.

**Implementation and Decision Making**

We use the State of California Response matrix as the foundation for our decision making.

# State of California 4 Stage Covid -19 Response Matrix



State of California guidelines are clear in recommending that “higher risk individuals” (over 65 or with important medical conditions) continue to stay home until Stage 4, and it is advice we endorse so as to ensure the well-being of all.

The chart, recommendations from UCC Leadership and requirements from the Ventura County Health Department shall be followed. The following recommended actions are made by the Moderators team, the Pastor, and Church Council.

**First Responses – Stage I – Safety and Preparedness**

The first response to the virus at COTF has been underway since the beginning of the emergency. Common sense social distancing and staying home has been ordered by the state and applied at the church. The following practices have been implemented:

• COTF has closed the church facilities and minimized/eliminated employee, community and congregational activities on the property. The facilities manager continues to monitor and maintain basic systems, structures and grounds.

• On-line worship services are in place and are being conducted from the Pastor’s home. These services are recorded to be accessed at any time.

• Bible/book studies are meeting on-line.

• On-line giving has been implemented.

• Phone trees have been established to provide contact between church council

members and the congregants.

• Council meetings have gone on-line via Zoom.

**The following outcomes have been realized:**

• “Worship Attendance” remains strong. While It has been difficult to determine actual

numbers, it appears as if attendance may have grown during the on-line experience.

Feedback is quite good from past attendees and new viewers.

• Giving to the church remains strong. There are new giving units appearing and initially

we are meeting and possibly exceeding anticipated church offerings. This in part was

made possible by the on-line giving addition.

• There has been an enhanced connection between Council members and the

congregation through the call tree.

• A capital campaign to fund a new children’s playground is growing.

**Additional work that can be accomplished in this stage:**

• Create a plan for permanent streaming capability in the sanctuary – including equipment and staffing.

• Contract any major maintenance projects for completion during the current church closure.

• Re-evaluate the current budget to redirect funds as appropriate to critical congregational and community needs.

**Risks Lowering – Stage 2 – Restrictions easing**

As conditions change the state, national and world response to the virus will create risk lowering results. We will not be able to predict the results, although we know that work of science and health care professionals is focused on control of the virus.

In visioning the future there is much that is hidden. The implied direction of all the current public health work is the return of community activities and close social engagement. There is no definitive date for the desired result and experts in the health care field provide timelines of from 1 to 4 years before a reliable vaccine is available.

Small incremental changes are anticipated for the church in this period. Actions may include:

• Purchase and install professional grade equipment to allow for

permanent streaming of church activities within the sanctuary and to conduct faith formation study and community contact.

• Complete County requirements for returning to work employees and volunteers with standards of conduct training.

• Increasing staff hours on the church property with established distancing and personal protection norms practiced. Provide for signage and personal protective supplies for our visitors and staff.

• Provide direction and training in “Covid Safe Practices” for all staff and volunteers.

* Install signage that informs delivery staff, visiting leadership and others on expectations and standards.

• Establish norms and standards for community use of church facilities. Coordinate with our user groups and develop a return plan.

• Creation of on-line groups for study and community building.

• Development of policies and limits for stage 3 and 4 opening (e.g. weddings, funerals, safe sleep, staffing…) Higher Risk/Use Intensities increased

**Stage 3 – General Opening Begins.** This stage will likely follow a significant reduction of active virus cases and the availability of new treatments for the infected. It specifically includes weddings, funerals and other limited church activities. It is not a stage intended as a general opening but rather controlled small group activities with strong boundaries and norms, either on campus or at remote locations.

•Worship service will continue online as in stages 1 and 2. We will begin to put plans in place to resume services that are led on campus by our Pastor but they likely will not be offered until stage 4. We will try to enable small groups (initially around 10 people) of normal-risk individuals to meet outside on campus or in people’s backyards for church or church-related activities during stage 3 provided a safety plan has been agreed upon by the organizers and Council.

* Provisions will be implemented for family focused memorial and wedding services. (limited attendance of less than twenty and strong safety norms).

• We will allow Council, Trustee and Committee Meetings on church property if proper distancing and protection standards are enforced. However, given that some members of these groups may not feel safe engaging in this way, particularly those at Higher-Risk, participation by video conferencing programs will continue to be a necessity.

* We will open the parking lot for the Safe Sleep Program with appropriate safety provisions.
* We will study feasibility of distancing seating in the sanctuary and Agoura Room, and develop plans for worshiping outside.

• Workdays are envisioned on the Church Grounds for both internal and external programs that include safe practices.

• Music program will formulate safe rehearsal and performance standards and seek Council approval.

* Staff will be active in preparing for Stage 4 return to church.
* We will study the feasibility of opening the sanctuary by appointment to individuals seeking time for spiritual contemplation.

**Major Risks Minimized – Stage 4** – Stay at Home Ends. This stage will most likely be the result of a major scientific breakthrough that offers protection to the general population. It is the first step to the new normal. We will be able to fully reopen facilities and reengage our partners on our facilities and in the community. It will be a time of continuing safety standards and general community health safety. We will:

• Continue to utilize “best practices” of technology to enhance the expansion of our on-line connections.

• Support health care professionals with a commitment to scholarships for nursing, physician’s assistants and paramedic students

• Provide the sanctuary with the most up to date methods for continued health and safety.

**OTHER SUPPORT ACTIONS:**

* Equip the Sanctuary and the Agoura Room with needed devices to provide broadcast and viewing capacity.

• Specifically support education via scholarships for health care professions such as: nursing, medicine, EMT, paramedic, and CNA regardless of their connection to the church.

* Increase outdoor space for small groups.

A COVID-19 Task Force is being formed (June 2020) to work with Church Council to coordinate reopening activities. Members include: Nancy Merrick MD MSPH, Chair; John Forrest Douglas, Pastor; Jim Word, member of the Board of Trustees; and Steve Treanor, Past-Moderator. The team will be providing reports of its activities and new developments on the Church of the Foothills website and in the Sower on an ongoing basis.

The team is happy to receive your questions and thoughts, now and throughout the reopening process.

**Appendix – External Input**

**1) Advice from our UCC Conference Minister**

**2) Excerpt from “Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith.” Centers for Disease Control, May 23, 2020.**

**3) COVID -19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies May 2 5, 2020 covid19.ca.gov**

**4) [REOPENING CALIFORNIA](about:blank) MAY 25, 2020 (NBClosangeles.com): “[California Allows In-Store Retail Shopping to Resume Statewide](about:blank)”**

**1) Advice from our UCC Conference Minister**

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| Friends,  As the State continues to re-open, the California Governor's Office has issued guidelines for places of worship. Please bear in mind that you will need to follow your **county's guidelines and directions for implementation.** Here is a summary of what the State is saying:  **Considerations for Places of Worship**   * Discontinue offering self-service food and beverages. Do not hold potlucks or similar family-style eating and drinking events that increase the risk of cross contamination. If food and beverages must be served, provide items in single-serve, disposable containers whenever possible. Employees or volunteers serving food should wash hands frequently and wear disposable gloves and face coverings. * Strongly consider discontinuing singing, group recitation, and other practices and performances where there is increased likelihood for transmission from contaminated exhaled droplets. Modify practices such as limiting the number people reciting or singing, ensuring physical distancing greater than six feet between people, or opt to celebrate these practices outside with physical distancing, etc., if these practices cannot be discontinued. * Consider modifying practices that are specific to particular faith traditions that might encourage the spread of COVID-19. Examples are discontinuing kissing of ritual objects, allowing rites to be performed by fewer people, avoiding the use of a common cup, offering communion in the hand instead of on the tongue, providing pre-packed communion items on chairs prior to service, etc., in accordance with CDC guidelines. * Reconfigure podiums and speaker areas, office spaces, meeting rooms, conference rooms, etc., to allow for at least six feet between people. Face coverings are strongly recommended at all times for congregants/visitors and staff, especially when physical distance of at least six feet is not possible. * Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic, if possible, and designate separate routes for entry and exit into meeting rooms, offices, etc., to help maintain physical distancing and lessen the instances of people closely passing each other. * Close self-service item selection such as pamphlet displays and bookshelves and provide these items to congregants/visitors individually as necessary. Consider delivering items and information electronically. * Discourage staff, congregants, visitors, etc., from engaging in handshakes, hugs, and similar greetings that break physical distance. Take reasonable measures to remind people to wave or use other greetings. * Reconfigure parking lots to limit congregation points and ensure proper separation (e.g., closing every other space). If performing drive-in services, ensure vehicle windows and doors are closed if six feet of distance is not possible between vehicles. * Continue to support non-in person attendance of services and other related activities by those who are vulnerable to COVID19 including older adults and those with co-morbidities.   You may download the entire document, which contains additional guidelines, by visiting: [https://covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf](about:blank" \t "_blank) |

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| + Peace,  Felix Villanueva - |

Conference Minister for United Church of Christ in Southern California and Nevada – May 2020

**2) Centers for Disease Control (CDC): Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith (5/23/20)**

(excerpted information is shown below).

“… we note that while many types of gatherings are important for civic and economic well-being, religious worship has particularly profound significance to communities and individuals, including as a right protected by the First Amendment. State and local authorities are reminded to take this vital right into account when establishing their own re-opening plans.

## **Scaling Up Operations**

* Establish and maintain communication with local and State authorities to determine current mitigation levels in your community.
* Provide protections for staff and congregants at [higher risk for severe illness](about:blank) from COVID-19. Offer options for staff at [higher risk for severe illness](about:blank) (including older adults and people of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions) that limit their exposure risk. Offer options for congregants at [higher risk of severe illness](about:blank) that limit their exposure risk (e.g., remote participation in services).
* Consistent with applicable federal and State laws and regulations, put in place policies that protect the privacy and confidentiality of people at [higher risk for severe illness](about:blank) regarding underlying medical conditions.
* Encourage any organizations that share or use the facilities to also follow these considerations as applicable.
* If your community provides social services in the facility as part of its mission, consult CDC’s information for [schools](about:blank) and [businesses and workplaces](about:blank), as relevant, for helpful information.

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### **Promote [healthy hygiene practices](about:blank)**

* Encourage staff and congregants to maintain good hand hygiene, [washing hands](about:blank) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
* Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for those who can safely use hand sanitizer), tissues, and no-touch trash cans.
* Encourage staff and congregants to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed.
* Whenever soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used.
* Consider posting signs on how to [stop the spread](about:blank" \t "new) of COVID-19 and how t, such as [washing hands](about:blank), covering coughs and sneezes, and [properly wearing a face covering](about:blank" \t "new)

### **Cloth face coverings**

* Encourage use of [cloth face coverings](about:blank) among staff and congregants. Face coverings are most essential when [social distancing](about:blank) is difficult. Note: [Cloth face coverings](about:blank) should not be placed on children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance. [Cloth face coverings](about:blank) are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.

### **Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation**

* [Clean and disinfect](about:blank) frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects in between uses.
* Develop a schedule of increased, routine cleaning and disinfection.
* Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
* Ensure [safe and correct application](about:blank) of disinfectants and keep them away from children.
* Cleaning products should not be used near children, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic fumes.
* Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
* If your faith community offers multiple services, consider scheduling services far enough apart to allow time for cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces between services. [Take steps](about:blank) to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of [Legionnaires’ disease](about:blank) and other diseases associated with water.

### **Promote social distancing**

* Take steps to limit the size of gatherings in accordance with the guidance and directives of state and local authorities and subject to the protections of the First Amendment and any other applicable federal law.
* Promote [social distancing](about:blank) at services and other gatherings, ensuring that clergy, staff, choir, volunteers and attendees at the services follow social distancing, as circumstances and faith traditions allow, to lessen their risk.
* Consider holding services and gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances and faith traditions allow.
* Consider appropriate mitigation measures, including taking steps to limit the size of gatherings maintaining [social distancing](about:blank), at other gatherings such as funerals, weddings, religious education classes, youth events, support groups and any other programming, where consistent with the faith tradition.
* Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or walkways and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and children remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating “one-way routes” in hallways).

### **Take steps to minimize community sharing of worship materials and other items**

* Consistent with the community’s faith tradition, consider temporarily limiting the sharing of frequently touched objects, such as worship aids, prayer rugs, prayer books, hymnals, religious texts and other bulletins, books, or other items passed or shared among congregants, and encouraging congregants to bring their own such items, if possible, or photocopying or projecting prayers, songs, and texts using electronic means.
* Modify the methods used to receive financial contributions. Consider a stationary collection box, the main, or electronic methods of collection regular financial contributions instead of shared collection trays or baskets.
* Consider whether physical contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging, or kissing) can be limited among members of the faith community.
* If food is offered at any event, consider pre-packaged options, and avoid buffet or family-style meals if possible.

### **Nursery/Childcare**

* If a nursery or childcare will be provided during services and events, refer to CDC’s information on [preventing the spread of COVID-19 in childcare settings](about:blank) and adapt as needed for your setting.
* If holding summer day camps, refer to CDC’s information on [youth and summer camps](about:blank) and adapt as needed.

### **Staffing and Training**

* Train all clergy and staff in the above safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that [social distancing](about:blank) is maintained…”

**3) COVID -19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies May 25, 2020 covid19.ca.gov**

Gov. Gavin Newsom released a framework Monday for reopening religious institutions that were ordered closed to the public due to the coronavirus pandemic

The guidelines include distancing measures, including limits on the number of people attending a service, and protocols for disinfecting and cleaning, such as additional hand sanitizer stations and rules around regularly cleaning microphones and other shared items.

The state is calling for limiting attendance to 100 people or 25 percent of the building's capacity, whichever is lower. That limit stays in effect for 21 days after the house of worship reopens, then conditions will be reviewed by health officials.

Face coverings are strongly recommended. The plan, outlined a dozen pages released by the state, also discourages the passing of offering plates and other items between people.

"Consider modifying practices that are specific to particular faith traditions that might encourage the spread of COVID-19," the statement posted on the state's Covid-19 response page said. "Examples are discontinuing kissing of ritual objects, allowing rites to be performed by fewer people, avoiding the use of a common cup, offering communion in the hand instead of on the tongue, providing pre-packed communion items on chairs prior to service, etc."

Distancing guidelines include a recommendation to shorten the length of services and offering additional meeting times to spread out the number of attendees to avoid large gatherings. Handshakes, hugs and other forms of greetings with physical contact also are discouraged.

Below are the specific recommendations.

Close places of worship for visitation outside of scheduled services, meetings, etc., whenever possible.

* Discontinue large gatherings that encourage congregants/visitors to travel and break physical distances during activities, such as concerts, large holiday and life event celebrations and remembrances.
* Close children's play areas and discontinue activities and services for children where physical distancing of at least 6 feet cannot be maintained.
* Prop or hold doors open during peak periods when congregants/visitors are entering and exiting facilities, if possible and in accordance with security and safety protocols.
* Close or restrict common areas, such as break rooms, kitchenettes, foyers, etc. where people are likely to congregate and interact.
* Reconfigure podiums and speaker areas, office spaces, meeting rooms, conference rooms, etc., to allow for at least 6 feet between people.
* Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic, if possible, and designate separate routes for entry and exit into meeting rooms, offices, etc., to help maintain physical distancing and lessen the instances of people closely passing each other.
* Close self-service item selection such as pamphlet displays and bookshelves and provide these items to congregants/visitors individually as necessary.
* Consider limiting the number of people that use the restroom at one time to allow for physical distancing.
* Reconfigure parking lots to limit congregation points and ensure proper separation (e.g., closing every other space).
* Discontinue offering self-service food and beverages. Do not hold potlucks or similar family-style eating and drinking events that increase the risk of cross contamination.
* Strongly consider discontinuing singing, group recitation, and other practices and performances where there is increased likelihood for transmission from contaminated exhaled droplets.

"This guidance does not obligate places of worship to resume in-person activity," the statement said. "Further, it is strongly recommended that places of worship continue to facilitate remote services and other related activities for those who are vulnerable to COVID19 including older adults and those with co-morbidities. Even with adherence to physical distancing, convening in a congregational setting of multiple different households to practice a personal faith carries a relatively higher risk for widespread transmission of the COVID-19 virus, and may result in increased rates of infection, hospitalization, and death, especially among more vulnerable populations. In particular, activities such as singing and group recitation negate the risk-reduction achieved through six feet of physical distancing."

**4) [REOPENING CALIFORNIA](about:blank) MAY 25, 2020 (NBClosangeles.com): “[California Allows In-Store Retail Shopping to Resume Statewide](about:blank)”** (excerpted)

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released interim  
guidance Friday for houses of worship, while continuing to warn that  
gatherings present a risk for increasing the spread of COVID-19. The CDC guidance includes standard recommendations such as frequent hand-washing, encouraging face coverings for staff and congregants, frequent cleaning of surfaces and promotion of social distancing through physical set-up and limited attendance.

The guidelines also recommend changes in the way houses of worship  
collect financial donations, limited physical contact such as shaking hands or  
hugging, and limiting the sharing of objects such as prayer books and cups.

More than 1,200 pastors and clergy from across California sent the  
governor a letter last week saying they plan to resume in-person services May  
31, regardless of state restrictions.

Some churches and faith leaders have also sued the state, seeking to  
compel the reopening of houses of worship, and the U.S. Department of Justice  
recently sent a letter to the state warning that restrictions on such  
facilities could be a violation of federal law.

1. High risk includes People aged 65 years and older, those living in a long-term care facility or nursing home, those with underlying medical conditions including chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, people who are immunocompromised, severe body obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, and those with liver disease. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)