



Funeral Guidance for Pastors and Churches

These are suggested guidelines for pastors offering care upon death of a parishioner. It is intended that all parties be consulted and agree to these as minimum precautions against COVID-19. Failure by any party to agree may limit or prevent the pastor from participation in this service.

- Seek to provide care for family and service planning via phone, Zoom or conference call, etc.
- Maintain social distancing in all in-person interactions. You set the tone. Do not shake hands or embrace. Masks should be worn.
- Talk with the funeral director as soon as possible and advocate for safe conditions for all involved.
- Check with funeral director in regards to viewing prior to other service planning.
- In consultation with both funeral directors and family, be clear about how many people might be able to attend and what will be required of each person in regards to health protocols.
- If family members have been exposed to COVID-19, insist on scheduling service 14 days after the exposure for the safety of all.
- Eliminate, as possible, any visitation or repass at the funeral home or church. If scheduled, all current health protocols including masks and social distancing should be observed by everyone in attendance.
- Suggest graveside service only. A memorial service can be held at a later date, if family desires.
- If funeral is to be held at the church, proper cleaning must be done before and after the service. For this reason, it is recommended to avoid scheduling a church funeral on Sunday.
- Offer use of technology to connect virtually with family and friends that are unable to attend.
- Travel individually or within family groups that are housed together (no limousines for pall bearers, so forth).
- Hand sanitizer should be accessible at entry/exit points.
- Family members with fevers or active coughs should not attend.
- Avoid sharing commonly used objects to help lower risk of spreading COVID-19.
- If programs are used, consider having one usher wearing gloves handle distribution.
- If a family/guest registry is to be used, consider having an attendant register each person from a socially distanced spot.
- Limit singing to a soloist or small ensemble, properly spaced from you and all guests. Use recorded music if possible.
- If indoors, plan for a socially distanced entry and exit strategy for those in attendance. Post signs as necessary. Remind them again before the dismissal and thank them at beginning and end of service for complying.





- Follow all current Mississippi State Department of Health and Mississippi Conference Pandemic Task Team guidelines for numbers of people gathering indoors or at graveside.

According to the CDC, the risk of COVID-19 spreading at gatherings and services is ranked as follows, from lowest to highest:

Lowest risk: Virtual-only services and gatherings.

Lower risk: Smaller outdoor, in-person services and gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least six feet apart, wear masks, do not share objects and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city or county).

Higher risk: Medium-sized in-person services and gatherings, either indoors or outdoors, adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least six feet apart, with some individuals wearing face masks and with some attendees coming from outside the local area. Sharing of items or objects is limited.

Highest risk: Large in-person services and gatherings held indoors and where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least six feet apart; many attendees travel from outside the local area. Few individuals wear masks and objects are shared.

Links that offer additional information include:

<https://www.mississippi-umc.org/care&coronavirus>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html>

<https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/ static/resources/8559.pdf>