



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis: During these challenging times, government and faith communities throughout Texas need to work together to love our neighbors and slow the spread of Coronavirus. To facilitate this collaboration, State and local governments must clearly articulate their directives aimed at mitigating spread of the virus. This updated joint guidance from the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Governor is the official guidance regarding the effect of Executive Order GA 16 on religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.

"We are pleased that Texas is giving the green light for in-person religious services to resume. This guidance respects religious freedom and provides responsible recommendations for houses of worship to continue ministering while doing their part to slow the spread of COVID-19," said Texas Values President and Attorney Jonathan Saenz.

The updated guidance letter released this afternoon took the form of a recommendation, saying houses of worship "should" conduct services remotely when possible and clarifying the government is making "only recommendations." Language from the previous guidance letter limiting services to 10 or fewer people is also removed, giving the green light for churches to allow larger gatherings while maintaining social distancing. The guidance letter also specifically says: "To the extent there is conflict between the Governor's Executive Order GA 16 and local orders, GA 16 controls. Local governments may not order houses of worship to close. "

Recommendations to houses of worship include:

- **Encouraging attendees who are 65 years old and above to stay home and watch services online, or provide a "senior service" exclusively for attendees 65 and above to attend in person.**
- **Asking all attendees are ill, or have underlying at-risk health conditions to stay home and watch services online.**
- **Greeters are to wear protective equipment such as gloves as masks;**
- **Keeping child care closed unless churches can comply with CDC guidelines for child care facilities.**
- **Encouraging all attendees to sanitize their hands and put on masks before entering the building.**
- **Ensuring attendees to sit with their family unit and use social distancing between each unit.**
- **Dismiss attendees by family unit, maintaining social distancing (from back to front).**
- **Having staff sanitize seats and frequently touched surfaces between services.**
- **No passing of collection plates (men serving with mask and gloves will take up the contribution).**
- **Communion will be served with a communion kit (by the men waiting on the table wearing mask and gloves).**