

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1200

May 19, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Safely Returning to Church Meetings and Activities

On March 12, 2020, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles announced that all public gatherings of Church members were temporarily suspended worldwide due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With this letter, we now authorize some meetings and activities to be resumed on a limited basis using a careful, phased approach. Area Presidencies will work with the member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Presidency of the Seventy who supervise them in deciding when and where meetings can begin in their area. Using caution and adhering to local regulations, they will inform stake and ward leaders when to function using phase 1 or phase 2 guidelines and when to return to standard practices.

The enclosure with this letter provides principles and details to guide this process, which may be adjusted by Area Presidencies as conditions require. Within guidelines provided by the Area Presidency and in counsel with his bishops, each stake president will determine the specific timing for resuming ward and stake meetings and activities.

We are grateful for the faith of our members as they have worshipped at home and are grateful for the blessings that will come as we gather for worship and activities.

Sincerely,

Russell M. Nelson

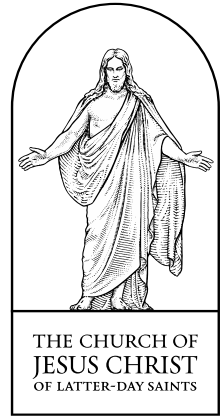
Dallin H. Oaks

Henry B. Eyring
The First Presidency

Guidelines for Safely Returning to Church Meetings and Activities

May 19, 2020

Enclosure to the May 19, 2020, First Presidency letter “Safely Returning to Church Meetings and Activities”



On March 12, 2020, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles announced that all public gatherings of Church members were temporarily suspended worldwide due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These Brethren have now authorized that meetings and activities may be resumed using a phased approach *when local government regulations allow and Area Presidencies inform local leaders*. When such permission is granted for your location, please proceed in a cautious, carefully planned and coordinated manner based on local government regulations.

General Guidelines

Please see the enclosed First Presidency letter of April 16, 2020, “[Administrative Principles in Challenging Times](#),” including the enclosures “[Administrative Principles in Challenging Times](#)” and “[Directions for Essential Ordinances, Blessings, and Other Church Functions](#).” Also, reference the document “[Responding to COVID-19: Answers to Questions](#).”

Please consider the following additional principles and guidelines:

- Use an abundance of caution in protecting the health and safety of members. Pay particular attention to members whose health or age puts them at high risk.
- Advise individuals who do not feel well, or who have been asked to self-quarantine, or who exhibit any of the following symptoms that they should not attend meetings: fever, cough, shortness of breath, headache, runny nose, or sore throat.
- Follow social distancing, handwashing, and other practices described in “[Preventative Measures for Members](#).”
- Follow government regulations in each location regarding public gatherings, including meeting size, frequency, and duration. Please apply government regulations.
- Please return to regular practices slowly, continuing to function remotely using technology while beginning in-person meetings in a phased approach as described below. Priority for in-person gatherings should be given to meetings where ordinances are performed, such as baptisms and sacrament meetings.

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Phased Approach

Area Presidencies, with approval of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve and the Presidency of the Seventy who supervise them, will inform stake and ward leaders when to function using phase 1 or phase 2 and when to return to standard practices. The following chart provides examples and may be adjusted by Area Presidencies, as conditions require. Within guidelines provided by the Area Presidency and in counsel with his bishops, each stake president will determine the specific timing for resuming ward and stake meetings and activities.

Meetings	Phase 1	Phase 2
Sabbath Day	Shortened meetings at the meetinghouse with up to 99 individuals, following local government regulations	Meetings at the meetinghouse with 100 or more individuals, following local government regulations
All other meetings and activities, including funerals, and weddings	Shortened meetings, following local government regulations or may be held remotely using technology	Meetings at the meetinghouse may be held following local government regulations.

Social distancing. Consider ways to maintain appropriate distance during meetings and classes and when entering and exiting the chapel and classrooms. Individuals from the same household may sit together, but others should sit with appropriate distance. It is recommended that choirs be temporarily suspended.

When more members desire to attend. When more members desire to attend than the above guidelines allow, leaders may hold multiple meetings during the day or invite members to attend on alternate weeks.

Multiple wards or branches in a meetinghouse. When more than one ward or branch attends in one meetinghouse, stake presidents should temporarily adjust meeting times to avoid overlapping schedules.

Areas with large wards. Wards with large attendance at meetings may need to wait to begin holding meetings at the phase-2 level. These wards may also need to alternate weeks of attendance to accommodate all members. On Sundays when members are not participating at the meetinghouse, they can hold home worship services and, when authorized by the bishop, have the sacrament administered at home by a worthy priesthood holder.

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Primary. During phases 1 and 2, leaders may determine whether to have nursery and some younger Primary classes. They may also determine whether to hold both singing time and classes.

Sanitary procedures. Leaders should ensure that buildings are thoroughly cleaned after each set of meetings, especially areas that are touched, such as doorknobs, light switches, water fountains, microphones, and pulpits. Wards may post signs in restrooms as a reminder to wash hands. Where available, hand sanitizer should be provided in meetinghouse foyers. According to local government regulations, members may be encouraged to wear face masks. Wards may consider discontinuing printed programs until conditions return to normal.

Blessing of children. The bishop may authorize blessings to be performed either at the family's home or at the meetinghouse.

Baptism and confirmation. Baptism and confirmation requires approval of priesthood leaders with the appropriate keys. Baptismal services may be held with as few as four people, or more where allowed. Others can view the baptism using remote technology. Until sacrament meetings return to normal schedules, converts may be confirmed immediately after their baptism rather than in a sacrament meeting. The Aaronic Priesthood may also be conferred upon males of the appropriate age immediately following their baptism and confirmation, under the direction of the bishop.

Administering the Sacrament—General Principles

To help keep members healthy and safe, priesthood holders in all cases should follow these general guidelines in the preparation and passing of the sacrament regardless of where it is administered:

- Priesthood holders who do not feel well should remain at home.
- Where available, priesthood holders may wear face masks while preparing, blessing, and passing the sacrament.
- Before preparing, blessing, or passing the sacrament, priesthood holders should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If hand washing is not available, they should use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. They should then avoid shaking hands or touching their eyes, nose, or mouth before preparing, blessing, or passing the sacrament.
- All should cover their cough or sneeze with a tissue. They should then throw the tissue in the trash and wash or sanitize their hands. Surfaces on sacrament trays, including handles, should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

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Administering the Sacrament in Homes

- Some members may not be able to gather for a time and should be ministered to individually. Where needed, bishops may continue to authorize worthy priesthood holders to prepare and administer the sacrament at home. If there are no worthy priesthood holders in the home, the bishop may authorize other worthy priesthood holders in the ward to prepare and administer the sacrament in the homes of members who request it.

Administering the Sacrament in Meetinghouses*

- Bishops may consider adjustments in passing the sacrament. For example, they might ask members to sit in every other bench or have chairs spaced so that priesthood holders can offer the trays to all members, rather than having individuals pass trays down the row.

** Photos that demonstrate how these principles may be properly applied are available at [Newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org).*

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47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1200

April 16, 2020

To: General Authorities; General Officers; Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, District, and Temple Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents

Dear Brethren and Sisters:

Administrative Principles in Challenging Times

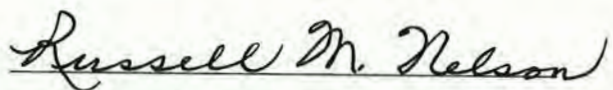
We are grateful for the efforts many of you are making to carefully follow the directions from national, state, and local leaders in many countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also taking appropriate precautions and is providing assistance to those in need.

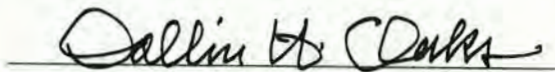
Under the present circumstances and under conditions that may exist in the future, the Church and its members will faithfully exhibit our commitment to being good citizens and good neighbors.

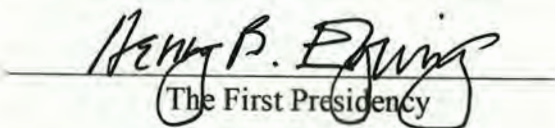
Included with this letter are documents that explain administrative principles for the Church during challenging times. Directions are enclosed for essential ordinances, blessings, and other Church functions to guide leaders through the current crisis and the challenging days that are ahead.

These documents are issued in response to the disruptions in Church procedures and member activities caused by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. They should provide guidance as long as this pandemic exists in a particular country or region. Other directions may be issued later.

Sincerely yours,






The First Presidency

ADMINISTRATIVE PRINCIPLES IN CHALLENGING TIMES

April 16, 2020

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints focuses on divinely appointed responsibilities to assist members as they progress on the covenant path toward eternal life. To help accomplish this divine purpose, the Church and its leaders provide priesthood authority and keys, covenants and ordinances, and prophetic direction. The Church invites all people to come unto Jesus Christ and faithfully obey His commandments.

Challenging Times

The scriptures are clear that in this dispensation we will experience challenging times. Amid difficult circumstances, the Church will proclaim fundamental principles and administer needed ordinances to bless Heavenly Father's children. Whatever the time or circumstances, certain things are essential in the Lord's Church. These include sacred doctrine and ordinances.

Global Citizen Responsibility

Members of the Church are grateful for the laws of many nations around the world that protect religious freedom and respect the sacred freedom of conscience.

The Church teaches that its members should sustain and uphold the laws where they reside. These governments enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest. We acknowledge that in exceptional circumstances all individual rights may be reasonably restricted, for a time to protect the safety of the general public.

In times of pandemic or natural disaster the Church will respond to official orders to take needed actions such as cancelling or postponing meetings or other gatherings. The Church and its members are committed to being good citizens and good neighbors. The Church has a long history of reaching out and providing assistance to those in need.

Along with our commitment to be good global citizens, we respectfully assert that reasonable accommodations be extended to all people of faith as they strive to participate in rites, that are foundational to their faith.

The Lord Has Prepared His Church

Inspired direction over many years has prepared the Lord's Church and its members, both temporally and spiritually, for changing and challenging times.

In addition to the long-time counsel for members to have food storage in their homes, Church members are focused on observing the Sabbath Day, ministering to others, and strengthening Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies. Through His prophets, the Lord has increased focus on home-centered, Church-supported gospel learning and living. Members have been encouraged to make their homes true sanctuaries of faith where children and youth are taught the gospel. The *Come, Follow Me* curriculum provides a model where members everywhere learn the gospel in their homes and at Church. The Children and Youth program is also home-centered, allowing parents to nurture their children spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially.

Members have been encouraged to use technology to share gospel messages in normal and natural ways. Missionaries have been provided devices that permit them to find and teach even when in-person contact is not possible. Members can engage in family history work from their homes.

When we look at the interlocking patterns of these efforts and many others, we can see how the Lord has carefully orchestrated and sequenced us to prepare for challenging times.

Foundational Principles and Ordinances

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a church of order. Ordinances and blessings are sacred acts provided by the authority of the

priesthood. While some procedures may change depending on circumstances, fundamental doctrine, principles, and ordinances must be protected.

Many ordinances require the laying on of hands, such as confirmations, ordinations, blessings, settings apart, and conferring of priesthood keys. Such ordinances require that the priesthood holder who performs the ordinance must be in the same location as the recipient. Priesthood ordinances cannot be performed remotely using technology. When circumstances require, others may observe the ordinance remotely using technology if authorized by the presiding authority.

In these challenging times, presiding authorities must exercise wisdom as to which ordinances should be temporarily deferred. When communicable disease is a concern, those who perform ordinances should take necessary precautions to protect themselves and others.

Attached hereto are directions for essential ordinances, blessings, and other Church functions.

These documents are issued in response to the disruptions in Church procedures and member activities caused by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. They should be used as guidance for so long as this pandemic

and its associated official limitations on Church meetings and public exposures exist in a particular country or geographic portion of a country. Other directions may be issued later.

Conclusion

As the prophet Nephi said, “the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). The Lord will help us. The power of the priesthood and the righteousness of members will help us go forward in days that are ahead.

DIRECTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL ORDINANCES, BLESSINGS, AND OTHER CHURCH FUNCTIONS

April 16, 2020

In exceptional times, ordinances can usually be accomplished while exercising necessary precautions. For example, when communicable disease is a concern, those who perform ordinances should thoroughly wash their hands and may also use gloves and face masks.

Baptisms and Confirmations

Baptisms and confirmations require the approval of a priesthood leader with the appropriate keys. When needed, baptismal services may proceed with as few as four people: the baptismal candidate, the priest or Melchizedek Priesthood holder performing the baptism, and two witnesses. A baptism is performed under the authorization of a bishop or mission president who holds the necessary priesthood keys. The bishop or mission president or someone they designate (who could be one of the witnesses) must observe and record the baptism and confirmation. If necessary, the person granting the authorization may do so remotely using technology. Leaders, family, and friends may observe remotely using technology. When sacrament meetings are temporarily suspended, converts may be confirmed immediately after the baptism.

Priesthood Ordinations and Settings Apart

Priesthood ordinations and settings apart require the advance approval of the person holding the appropriate priesthood keys. They also require the physical laying on of hands by an authorized priesthood holder. The ordinance must be observed and recorded by the individual holding the priesthood keys or someone he designates. If necessary, this individual may observe the ordinance remotely using technology. Leaders, family, and friends may observe remotely using technology.

Ordinations, callings, and settings apart may be performed without a prior sustaining in ward and stake settings if approved in advance by the person holding the appropriate priesthood keys. This allows the work of the Lord to move forward, and the action is later ratified when meetings are resumed.

Administering to the Sick

A priesthood blessing requires the physical laying on of hands. Normally, two or more Melchizedek Priesthood holders administer, but one may do it alone. After taking every necessary precaution, when conditions prohibit placing hands on a person's head, a prayer can be offered, including using technology. This is a prayer of faith and not a priesthood blessing. Anyone at any time may pray, fast or otherwise minister to others.

Administering the Sacrament

Members should take advantage of the blessings of attending sacrament meeting and partaking of the sacrament weekly when possible. In exceptional circumstances, when ward sacrament meetings are not held for an extended time, a bishop may authorize worthy priesthood holders in his ward to prepare and administer the sacrament in their own homes or in the homes of other ward members who do not have a worthy priest or Melchizedek Priesthood holder in the home. (See *General Handbook*, 18.9.1.) When needed, the sacrament may be administered by a single priest or Melchizedek Priesthood holder.

Members may provide their own bread and water. However, preparing the sacrament should be done by the authorized priesthood holder(s). The priesthood holder(s) administering the sacrament must be in the same location as those who receive it when they break the bread, say the prayers, and pass the emblems. In unusual circumstances when the sacrament is not available, members can be comforted by studying the sacrament prayers and recommitting to live the covenants members have made and praying for the day they will receive it in person, properly administered by the priesthood.

Individuals and families are blessed when they can hold a private, home-centered Sabbath worship service, in person or remotely. Such worship

can include prayers, hymns, and gospel study. When authorized, priesthood holder(s) are present, the sacrament may be blessed and passed.

Other Church Functions

Meetings. In extreme circumstances, leaders may temporarily suspend meetings and activities. When conditions require, bishopric meetings, interviews, and ward council meetings may take place remotely using technology, such as phone calls or video calls. Bishops and ward leaders may use technology for messages to supplement a member's home centered worship.

Ministering. Ministering brothers and sisters will discover that there are varied ways to provide needed support to their assigned individuals and families. Whether ministering is done in person or remotely using technology depends on local circumstances and the needs, desires, and health of those involved. Ministering interviews may be done remotely using technology when needed. In extreme cases, in-person ministering may be limited to addressing a serious and urgent physical, mental, or emotional need. Ministering brothers and sisters should demonstrate their love and support in appropriate ways.