

Guidance for Emmaus Ministries Communities in a Post-COVID World

As vaccines for COVID-19 have become available, Emmaus Ministries communities continue to reach out to the International Office for guidance.

As a basis for conversation, we want to inform you that The Upper Room as a whole continues to exercise, and to invite its constituents to exercise, prudence and caution. In 2020 Discipleship Ministries and The Upper Room took bold measures to ensure the health and well-being of not only their employees, but also all our partners in ministry by having all staff work from home and closing our building to visitors and staff. Working from home and reduced use of our building have since become a permanent arrangement. There is also a halt on all travel until mid-2021 to assist as well.

At this time, with global infection numbers over 136 million and death numbers in the United States alone approaching 600,000, we want to again advise great caution and discernment in plans to begin offering full 4th Day experiences as we have in the past. As vaccines becomes more widely available, the ability to return to a new normal will be more accessible. But until that time, we will continue to advise following the Wisconsin Council of Churches' release in the midst of the pandemic: *"The way forward will not be a matter of following a timetable, but of faithfully discerning the signs of the times, and responding accordingly."*

Therefore, as local Emmaus Ministries Communities deliberate, we encourage you to:

- **be sensitive to the above-mentioned concerns.**
- prayerfully seek divine guidance on the most appropriate season, location, and conditions in which events will be held.
- to keep **the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of potential team members and participants at the forefront of any decision.** The last thing any community wants is to have an event be forever known as "the COVID Walk (Flight, Encounter, etc.)."
- **Check with your insurance carrier.** We have not heard of any carriers who are offering a COVID rider on liability policies. However, we have heard of communities who have hosted events in the last year and have become "super-spreaders" of the virus. These communities have no insurance to fall back on as the carriers are saying these events are not covered due to the community going against federal, state, and community mandates.
- **form a Task Force** of both Lay and Clergy who are familiar with the environment in which the community hosts events. This Task Force will look at event schedules with the facility in mind and find where problems could possibly occur (bottlenecks, limit in numbers of participants to maintain safe distances, increase sanitization policies, etc.) and recommend changes.

- The Task Force will ensure that team members will be in the best possible position to contribute to the development of an environment of grace in which participants will experience God's amazing love and grace in new and life-changing ways.

Where the decision is made to continue hosting events, local Emmaus Ministries Communities will need:

- A) To adhere to federal recommendations for gatherings.
 - o Some excellent information is available from the CDC website.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>
- B) To follow YOUR state's recommendations for gatherings – An example from Tennessee is provided below.
 - o <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/governorsoffice-documents/House%20of%20Worship%20Guidance%20FBCI.pdf>
- C) To abide by local recommendations for gatherings – A Nashville example is provided below.
 - o <https://www.asafenashville.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fifth-Amended-and-Restated-Order-12-FINAL-SIGNED-30-Dec-20-1.pdf>
- D) Respect the facility's (retreat center's, camp's, etc.) policies.

As God's people, more than ever, we are confident that the things we hope for will become reality. To this end, in our effort to honor God, team members, and participants, together with our siblings around the world, we continue to seek divine guidance for the work that lies ahead of us.

Much grace and peace going forward.

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For more resources for spiritual wellness in anxious times, we encourage you to visit upperroom.org/covid-19.