

OPENING OUR DOORS TO THE NEW NORMAL

Things to consider for Churches re-opening
their premises



THE NEW NORMALITY A CHALLENGE FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

Viva is an international organization based in the United Kingdom. Our vision is to see children safe, well and reaching their God-given potential and our mission is to inspire lasting change in children's lives through the power of collective action. We believe that a network of churches and community organizations, locally focused and united in a purpose, is the best possible vehicle to achieve lasting change for children and adolescents. To this end, we work in 27 countries through 38 networks.

PASSION LED US HERE

Taking the first steps for the reopening of the local Church in the community. A guide to take safe steps. Carmen Alvarez González, Viva team for Latin America and the Caribbean. May 2020. Costa Rica

viva
together for children



**The Great Commandment says:
"Love the Lord your God
..." Love your neighbor
as yourself" (Matthew
22: 37-39).**

During this pandemic, one way to express love for ourselves is to do what we can to protect ourselves from infection. Similarly, one way we express love for our neighbor is by doing what we can to protect him from infection. In just a few months, this pandemic has dramatically changed our lives and upset our world. The pain and anxieties it has caused around us are real. Furthermore, as Christians we regret the inability to meet in person with our Church communities. We deeply desire to meet again. However, we must consider how to do it safely in a way that takes into account our most vulnerable neighbours and does not fuel the spread of COVID-19. It is important to remember that during the lock down caused by COVID -19, the Church never closed, only the doors of our buildings. As disciples of Christ, we are learning to live out our call to worship, pray, encourage, witness, disciple, and serve creatively to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. We have gone online, transfered our small groups to video chats, served the most vulnerable in our communities and found new ways to love our neighbors. We continue to be God's people; we, not our buildings, we are the true church."

As we think about gathering to meet, it is important to recognize that ministry will not be carried out in the same way as before.

Humanitarian Institute



Four principles to consider before re-opening Church premises

As many countries come out of lock down, many of us are considering if, how and when to open our church buildings. The following principles can help us as we think about this:

Humility: Humbly examine our possible biases, influences, pressures, and our church's strengths and weaknesses that could have a negative effect on our ability to make wise decisions.

Love: our neighbour by communicating clearly to all how and when we will reopen our church and ministries so that our actions help and do not inadvertently cause harm. .

Persistence: Mentally approach the reopening process and help our church navigate COVID-19 as a "marathon", not a "sprint," considering a long-term vision (eg, Scripture talks about finishing the race , not being the first in the race).

Wisdom: Keep informed and disseminate scientific information and guidance. If possible, track the number of local cases, so we are aware of local risk. Be aware of and follow local and national guidelines.

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in our churches

It is important that we follow National Guidelines and laws about the re-opening of church premises for meetings and gatherings. These guidelines will vary from country to country. We must make sure that we are following advice and taking all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our churches.

The church is a high risk setting for the transmission of COVID-19. There are examples where this has led to painful and cascading consequences for our churches and communities. Some people in our churches are at increased risk for serious complications from COVID-19, especially older adults, people with chronic conditions, and even children. Churches need to have scientific knowledge about the virus to prevent its spread in our churches and have thought through a clear plan about how to resume face to face meetings safely.

What we know about COVID-19

Scientific evidence shows that COVID-19 is expanding rapidly. Experts agree that it is here to stay in all countries. Until a vaccine is available, the virus and the disease will continue to be a threat to our public health.

The following information is particularly relevant to churches as they consider how to resume face-to-face services:

1. COVID-19 can be transmitted before people develop symptoms. The virus spreads easily and stealthily. This complicates efforts to contain its spread.
2. Sometimes people carrying the virus have no symptoms, but they can still infect another person. Factors that lead to the transmission of COVID-19 include actions that increase the release of respiratory droplets into the surrounding air, proximity to an infected person (within six feet (2 metres). Such actions include sneezing, coughing but could also include singing
3. By touching infected people and/or contaminated objects or surface, you can also catch COVID-19 if you touch your face with your hands. This is called contact transmission
4. In environments where there are more people, the risk of transmission will be greater. Because older people are susceptible to COVID-19 and children are less likely to develop symptoms, intergenerational contact should be minimized to reduce transmission of COVID-19. Adults with common chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and autoimmune disease are also at increased risk of serious complications.
5. It is important to note that children who have been infected have also developed complications from COVID-19, so we must also be diligent in reducing exposure to children
6. COVID-19 can spread from one city to another. If one part of the country has a poorly controlled pandemic, states that have significantly reduced their cases will continue to be vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

Using Masks

Because anyone who enters a church could be an asymptomatic spreader of COVID-19, and churches generally meet indoors, wearing face masks could reduce the spread of the virus. Advice on the wearing of masks will vary from country to country, but it is worth considering.

It is important to note that not all masks are the same; Surgical masks offer more protection than cloth masks, which are a hygiene tool and not protective equipment. If you are not chronically ill and under the age of 65, a cloth mask may be enough. We advise that churches have looked into the likelihood of wearing masks and have a plan to explain the types of masks available, ways to wear masks, and a program to offer masks to the congregation. If leaders wear masks, this could remove stigma associated with them.



Persistence of Coronaviruses on Surfaces



Source: *J. Hosp. Infect.* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhin.2020.01.022>

Note: Coronavirus activity may be impacted by temperatures higher than 86°F (30°C). Authors also confirm that coronavirus may be effectively wiped away by household disinfectant. COVID-19 was NOT included in this study

Medscape

THINKING ABOUT RE-OPENING YOUR CHURCH PREMISES

If you are thinking about re opening your church building, make sure you that you are aware of and following national guidelines or laws. Before opening, you will need to prepare which activities should return and how these activities will happen. Then you will need to think about the best way to reopen your doors to the congregation, minimizing the risks of contagion for anyone entering your building.

Opening your premises will require a different regime of cleaning, hygiene and social distancing. Anyone arriving at the church entrance should see and perceive that they and their families are safe.

KEEP INFORMED

It is important to know the risk factors for the virus. This can help you make decisions about staff, volunteers, and whether you want to open the church sooner or later. Being informed is vital. In this link you will find a video to keep in mind the basic prevention measures for coronavirus

How to protect yourself against COVID-19 WHO
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1APwq1df6Mw>



Enabling Church members to be part of the process

We suggest keeping a list of your church members and those who attend regularly on hand, update your contact details (phone, email, home address, etc.). This will allow you to call or write to invite them to be part of reopening the Church premises. It will also help you find volunteers for each of the tasks required to reopen the church.

Ask yourself:

1. Do I have a health professional in the congregation to help me develop better church health practices to prevent COVID-19 infection?
2. Do I have a church cleaning and disinfection protocol to apply when reopening?
3. What areas of the church need a deep cleaning before someone returns?
4. Who can help prepare the Church facilities to be ready and comply with the Ministry of Health guidelines during the time the church is open?
5. What ongoing cleaning protocols (daily, weekly, monthly) should be developed and implemented once you meet again in the church?
6. What do we need to comply with sanitation protocols?



Maintenance and preparation of infrastructure

As you walk through your church with fresh eyes in preparation for returning to activities, take note of the areas that need attention. Undoubtedly, this will reveal elements where extra funding is needed plan in advance the areas that will need repair or attention to guarantee the health of the congregation when reopening.

These questions can guide you:

These questions can guide you:

1. What areas of the church need additional renovation or cleaning to exhibit better overall cleanliness for its members?
2. What is the cost of these projects?
3. Who can be recruited to do this? (Volunteers, church staff)
4. What resources do they need?
5. How can we practice social distancing while meeting together? What space is required?
6. What are the priorities based on emerging need and availability of resources?



Leadership

Leading well in this time of uncertainty is essential. Meet in prayer with your leadership team to navigate this time of transition. Evaluate the mission God has called your church to and identify how it will continue to impact your community. Naturally, there will be new ministry opportunities to develop and it is very likely that there are some previous ministry programs that may already be outdated.

Ask yourself:

1. How can you communicate to your church and community the steps you are taking to maintain clean and safe premises and a relevant future ministry?
2. What good habits has your church adopted in the past few months that you need to integrate right away (for example, small group care, digital communication)?
3. What should you stop doing?
4. What new things should start?
5. Is it necessary to make changes to church personnel? (eg change in job responsibilities to address new ministry needs)

Do not follow the decision-making process alone. Think about forming a reopening team within your church, surround yourself with trusted and knowledgeable leaders, and consult with medical and public health experts (including your local health department). As Christians and as a church, you are part of a body with different gifts and roles. This metaphor also identifies the strength of collaboration as the passage says, "Its parts should have equal concern for each other." (1 Corinthians 12:25)



Ministries

The ways that Church ministries operate may need to change if opening up your church premises for activities. Some things to consider:

Pastoral needs: How could activities in the church be combined with an online platform (WhatsApp, Facebook, zoom etc.) that can be offered to those who do not feel safe to return to the building or to those that want stay connected from afar (eg, small groups, prayer meeting, ministry teams)

Sunday School: Will your church continue to provide child care during services in the same way as before? If so, what additional precautions will you take in this area (for example, temperature controls, snack time modification / social distancing?)

Programmes: What preparations do you need to start making now to be ready for adjustments to your vacation Bible school schedule (eg, church, virtual, or home)?

Families: How will you deal with the personal and family struggles that may have arisen in the past few months (eg, marriage or financial stress, emotional or physical abuse, job loss)?

FINANCES

Budget planning is a critical as you plan to re-open your church buildings to enable collective worship. You will need to think through

1. What has been the impact on tithes and offerings?
2. Can you project long-term trends in donations and what will be the impact of these donation trends?
3. How are you going to finance extra outgoings as a result of COVID -19 (cleaning supplies, hand sanisters, rennovations to infrastructure to ensure social distancing)
4. What new ministry opportunities have you identified and what are the associated costs?
5. Can you make immediate adjustments to the church budget or do the changes require the approval of the church body?

Prayerfully reflect on how God could continue to guide your church in light of COVID-19 and considerations for the reopening process. Ask God to open your eyes to ways in which your church's unique resources and current ministries could be used to help safely reopen in-person meetings. Pray for guidance that your church leadership team is wise in its decisions not to put the most vulnerable in your congregation and community at risk. (Humanitarian Institute)

How can the Church contribute to preventing the spread of Coronavirus?

Follow national guidelines and laws and promote measures recommended by these guidelines, motivate families to follow practices at home. Respect social distance

Prevent people with symptoms or suspected coronavirus from attending meetings. In some countries, national guidelines may require that those who arrive at a public gathering have their temperature measured.

Have a sink or hand sanitizer at the entrance to the Church, and do not allow anyone, including boys and girls, to enter without washing or santising their hands. Encourage people not to touch their faces and remind them of how to handle coughs or sneezes.

Don't encourage high-risk individuals with complicated chronic illnesses to attend church gatherings.

Promote and respect the order to wear a mask if this required by national guidelines



People will be the same when they return, but with new relationship practices!

Prepare for what's next!

BEFORE REOPENING CHURCH PREMISES

There will be new opportunities to minister to new wounds that have been created during this time of crisis by COVID-19.



Before re opening church premises, everything will need to be thoroughly cleaned.

Consider washing carpets, sanitizing benches, bathrooms, door knobs, light switches, and microphones. Use chemicals and disinfectants as directed and allow adequate drying times. Use disinfectants approved for COVID-19.

Pay attention to the preschool and children's areas. Consider removing non-essentials from the room to limit surfaces for possible contamination and do a thorough cleaning between uses. Temporarily remove Bibles, hymn books, pens, information cards, etc. from the backs of chairs or benches. Do not distribute anything to avoid contamination. Put up posters about not shaking hands and greetings without contact.



In this link you will see how new greetings have emerged as a result of the coronavirus
New Coronavirus greetings <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umEskepeRwc>

Consider putting up signs in main meeting rooms and Sunday School classrooms to ensure social distancing. Make sure that chairs are the required distance apart from each other.

Prepare the congregation through door flyers, email, and social media how the church has been prepared for their arrival. Use the words "clean", "safe", "aware of health needs" "in preparation for a non-contact experience" or something similar. Make sure that people know if they are sick, they shouldn't attend a meeting where they will have contact with others.

THINKING THROUGH HOW TO CONDUCT A CHURCH SERVICE



“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”
Hebrew 10: 23-25

As Christians, we are called to meet together. But following COVID-19, we may need to find new ways of doing this, which don't necessarily look the same as they used to. This is particularly true of Church Services, which traditionally have involved large gatherings of people.

Firstly, it is important to adhere to any national guidelines or laws about opening up spaces for corporate worship. Then we should consider the possibility that we may not be able to have so many people in a space at the same time. This leads us to reflect on what is the core purpose of a Church Service, what are the core elements of a Church Service that we need to keep and what may we need to lose so that we can conduct Church services safely?

The following ideas about organisation church services could be considered.



Organising spaces to enable social distancing

Rooms can be organized so that families who have been sharing the same living space can sit together around tables. Chairs can be set at the required distance apart around the table, so that those who come alone can join a social bubble.

Service times and location

Keep an online meeting option for those who are afraid or unable to attend your service in person. Many churches have seen an increase in engagement as their online presence has increased. Take advantage of this! It offers a greater possibility of social distancing.

One way to ensure that your services are evenly distributed is to have people sign up for a service. You can use Facebook events and have people check which event they will attend. Remember that if you have multiple services, you will need to clean between each service. You can shorten the service time to help with the cleaning time thoroughly. Some churches are moving to have multiple services during the week to allow for cleaning between service times. Determine how many volunteers you have available to help. Limit volunteers to those who do not have pre-existing conditions and those who are under 65 years of age.

Elements of church services: Celebrate returning to be together, but be aware of the need to lament too, depending on the circumstances of your congregation. Encourage praise and prayer, provide moments of witness and a sermon that encourages people to accept the changes in life that God has revealed to them during quarantine.

Change the way the sacrament is offered. Avoid passing a plate or bowl. Avoid passing microphones on stage. You may consider not using choirs or singing in services.

Offerings or Donations: Continue to offer online donation options. Have stations in the church where people can leave offerings instead of passing a plate. You can place mailboxes, boxes, baskets, etc. Clean the pulpit after each use. Consider lining up in an orderly manner to make a donation to ensure there is social distancing.



SERVICES: COFFEE, NEWSLETTERS AND HAND SANITIZER

Bathrooms: You will need to decide whether to allow the use of the bathroom on your premises. If you cannot make it safe from the transmission of COVID -19, then it may not be time to return to the building. If you choose to keep your toilets open, be sure to post posters on how to wash your hands in the bathrooms with the proper guidelines for doing so.

Coffee: We recommend that you do not serve coffee or food after the service at this time, but if you do, use disposable cups and utensils and make sure that hand sanitizer is available. You could consider providing face masks for those who don't have one or can't afford to buy them. It is recommended that you do not distribute newsletters before or after the service to avoid contact transmission of the virus.

Welcoming and greeting. Provide security and enroll ushers to be both internal and external hosts. Explain to them in advance how to greet people: They should not shake hands or hug. Make sure the doors are kept open or that ushers open the doors. This prevents too many people touching the same surface. Greeters and volunteers should be able to answer questions about procedures and policies upon returning to the building. Train them in advance if possible. If your toilets are open, have the people who watch over them supervise the restrooms to make sure they wash their hands and social distancing is followed.



SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUPS

You will need to consider whether you will have Sunday school or small groups. You may have to consider dividing groups to maintain social distancing standards. You could also allow small groups to use the church on different days / nights if they choose to meet in person. Be sure to communicate with group leaders about when groups will resume and how they will be meeting. If you have groups sharing the same space, you should clean door handles, water fountains etc between uses

Consider talking through a plan for your leaders and teachers. Will you discuss what God revealed to you in quarantine? Will you encourage a time of prayer and praise? Have a clearly defined teaching plan with Sunday School teachers. This is still a great time to share together and grow in community. Take the opportunity to train your leaders, they also need support and guidance.

Make sure you have your child protection policies in place



MATERNAL, PRESCHOOL AND INFANTS

Take into account the national guidelines when making decisions about opening up facilities for young children. Bear in mind that if you're wearing a face mask, it's probably too early to open your preschool areas. Masks can scare them. Some churches are choosing to reopen preschool and children's areas when schools are open.

It is advised to pre-register boys and girls to control how many are in any room at one time. Some churches are starting with a limit of five children in each room at the beginning. Be aware that some children may experience separation anxiety after being alone with their parents after such a long time. Rooms need to be thoroughly cleaned between each use.

It is important that volunteers working with children are trained in new protocols that need to be followed following COVID -19

Music teams

There is some debate about whether singing transmits the COVID -19 virus. Other advice suggests that facemasks should be worn during services. It is important to adhere to national health guidelines on this issue.

In any case, current advice is not use large worship bands or choirs and that people are spaced properly. Each person in a music group should be assigned their own microphone which they should use each time. It is suggested that hymn books are not used to avoid contact transmission.





Technological Equipment

All technological equipment such as microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, etc. need to be cleaned after use with alcohol based cleaner (not water). It is important to keep a record of when the item was cleaned.

Online services.

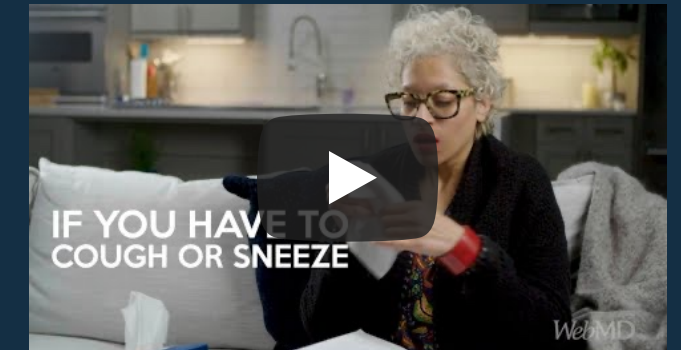
If you have an online presence, it is worth thinking through whether you want to keep it for those people who are not able to come to the church building. Facebook may be more accessible since many people have accounts, but consider other options such as YouTube for those who want to watch on their smart TVs or mobile phones. If you don't have media or technology at your fingertips, consider other ways that you can help to connect with those who cannot come to a face to face meeting with others.



How do you contribute to stopping the pandemic:

1. If you have the flu or feel unwell don't go to church. Make sure you know how to cough or sneeze to prevent the spread of infection.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a220fnvLyxY> How to Safely Cough and Sneeze | WebMD



2. Follow the preventative measure of washing your hands properly.

Video: wash hands | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lisgnbMfKvI> Hand-washing Steps Using the WHO Technique



3. If using the mask, wear it correctly. Video Do you know how to use a mask? Follow these recommendations <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>



Do not touch your face if you have not washed your hands, that can make you not sick !!

Annex I Preparing your Church for the Coronavirus. Humanitarian Institute, 2020



viva
together for children

Preparing the church for the coronavirus

Annex II Things the parents and teachers needs to know



Coronavirus (COVID-19) guide for parents



Teachers - Coronavirus 19



Annex III Distribution and food assistance during COVID-19: a guide for church networks



Distribution and food assistance during COVID-19: a guide for church networks

Guidance taken from the World Food Program, World Health Organization, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Prepare to have a successful project

Who will receive your food packages?

Food assistance must target the most vulnerable and be fair and equitable, and the community must understand who benefits and how they made their decision. Generally, it is a good idea to establish some criteria to make your decision: who is most at risk? For church networks, it is likely that they are people who are already participating in their network programs and their immediate families. In this context, it may be necessary to act quickly and offer a general distribution to all households within a community with lack of access. You will need to be flexible and re-prioritize as the crisis unfolds and be ready for the changes that arise.

What will be in your food packages?

It will likely provide additional food. However, a good guide is the World Food Program (WFP) food basket that includes:

- A local staple like flour or rice.
- Beans, lentils, chickpeas, or other legumes
- Vegetable oil
- Sugar
- Salt

Try to fill in the gaps in nutrients and diet and prioritize the elements that help create a balanced diet. Food must be of good quality, must be in use by date and must not be handled. Choose foods that do not require long cooking if fuel is low. While nutritional value is the primary consideration in providing food assistance, products must be familiar to recipients. If possible, the packaging should allow direct distribution without the need to re-measure or repack.

How will you engage and communicate with communities?

Find a way to keep a record of all beneficiaries (even if you do it over the phone or using existing network records), but don't do it in a way that increases risk. When planning the basic basket, check with the community (including women and girls) to take into account local and cultural preferences. If it's a one-time distribution, make sure the beneficiaries know about it. Do not promise regular distributions unless you are sure this is possible, and rather make sure that recipients are linked to any official channel of government support available. Make sure communities know that all help articles are free. Use your distribution activities as a platform to spread awareness messages and information at the community level to reduce misinformation and fear of COVID-19, in simple local language. Schedule the distributions in a way that considers the travel time it will take for the volunteers who will distribute the food, take the support team into consideration



As you work ensure safety and effectiveness

Minimizing the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries At all stages of your response, you must comply with the latest guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO) and your government. You should not enter a quarantine area where movement is restricted by law, or require people to leave their homes when instructed not to. Where vulnerable people are left without access to food, work with authorities to find ways to allow access. At all times, including when obtaining food, preparing food packages or during distributions:

- There must always be at least 2 meters between people (both personal and beneficiaries)
- Wash your hands frequently, and always before and after handling food and packages.
- Avoid touching your face. Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then discard the used tissue immediately. During distributions where people come to collect food packages from a central point:
 - Do not allow crowding around the distribution point, and clearly mark the waiting areas.
 - Prepare a 2 meter reception desk cordoned off with tape or rope for 1 person at a time
 - Set up handwashing areas for recipients upon arrival for their package.
 - Allow a personal space of at least 2 meters between each beneficiary.
 - Make sure there are clearly marked entry and exit points
 - Store food separately from collection points when possible. For distributions where you deliver packages directly to homes:
 - Do not enter houses; leave deliveries at the door and step back from the door to allow the recipient to pick up the food package
- What to do when someone shows symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath)
 - Make sure you know where to refer people with symptoms for medical care and that you can follow current government guidelines on isolation and quarantine.
 - If you or your team show symptoms of COVID-19, do not continue working on the project and follow current government guidelines on isolation and quarantine.



How can you ensure that your response keeps children safe?

- Make sure that all project staff and volunteers have read and signed the protection policy to protect children.
- Volunteer church staff and leaders must also sign their church's protection policy. Inform staff and volunteers on how to report suspected cases of abuse, follow the protocols of their protection policy

How will you verify that your project is helping people?

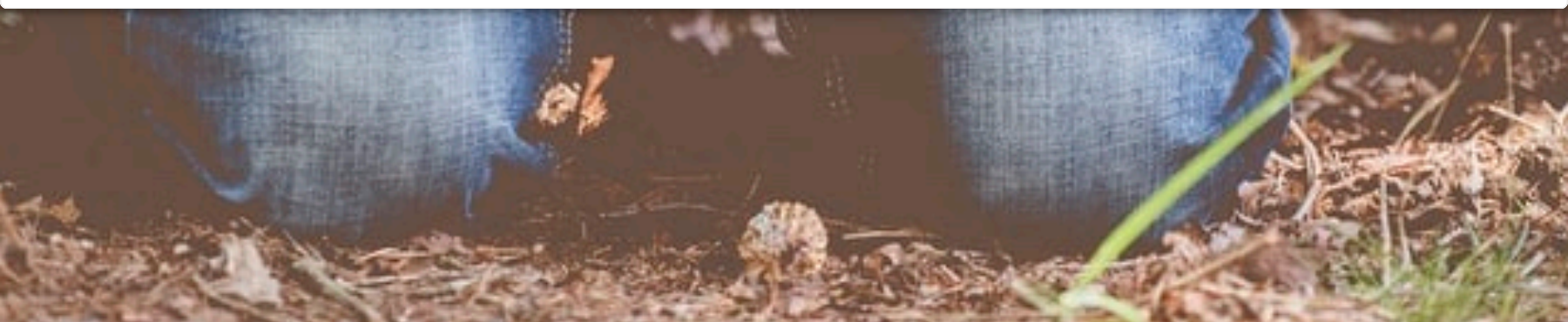
- Establish a confidential comment and complaint mechanism (for example, a phone number) so that beneficiaries can report any concerns or complaints.
- Measure the quality of your activity by defining some questions such as: how many beneficiaries are happy with the food provided. The percentage of beneficiaries who are happy with the mechanisms to receive food and, if appropriate, can make phone calls or WhatsApp to do some interviews to assess the quality of their food distribution project.
- Collect disaggregated data on beneficiaries (boys, girls, men, women, people with disabilities)



Annex IV COVID-19 Spiritual first aid - tips



[Covid-19 spiritual first aid tips](#)



**So that they have life and have it
in abundance ... Jesus**



This guide is an initiative of Viva Together for Children and Red Viva Costa Rica, to support the local church to prepare for the reopening of its doors, based on the guidelines of the Ministry of Health for the prevention of coronavirus. We hope these guidelines will be useful for other countries where churches are thinking through how to safely resume activities on their premises.



The church's mission is strengthened by the interaction between trust, credibility, and commitment