

# COVID Precautions and Recommendations for OSAC Small Groups

August 31, 2020

***“And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” Hebrews 10:25 NLT***

COVID-19 has created implications for our small group discipleship ministry. Although the pandemic has made meeting together more difficult, it is still essential to our spiritual health as disciples of Jesus. This document is designed to support you in your ministry as small group leaders through this season, **ever changing** it takes into consideration the **current** recommendations of both our Ontario Government and Public Health guidelines for small gatherings.

## **Online or In Person?**

The benefits towards creating genuine community in person certainly have become evident over the past 6 months. I'm certainly glad Jesus physically came to earth and walked among us as opposed to inviting us to a zoom meeting. However, online meetings are better than no meetings at all and they even have a few surprising benefits.

**Online** - Online meetings best facilitate groups without children, groups with higher risk members and groups where physical meeting remains uncomfortable for the majority of group membership. Meeting online is difficult, it is technology dependent, it can be unnatural for some. But it remains a way to continue to meet together, to encourage each other and grow as disciples of Jesus. If you have decided online is the best route for your group in this season note that our church has a premium zoom account dedicated for small group use. Contact me if you'd like help signing in and setting up your next zoom meeting.

**In Person** - If you are comfortable meeting in person with your small group current phase 3 guidelines allow for meetings of groups up to 50 indoors. Here are some recommendations as per Ontario Government and Public Health guidelines to help you create a safe environment for meeting both for you and those who attend your small group.

- **Self Screening** - Prior to each meeting, individuals should prepare themselves for meeting by self screening. See attached self screening checklist.
- **Physical Distancing** - Guidelines recommend individuals keep a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from others in public. This may be difficult to adhere to based on the size of your physical space and numbers. In order to help with this I recommend limiting group numbers, meeting outdoors, in large spaces or meeting in multiple spaces indoors.
- **Cleaning/Hand Washing** - I understand hosting others in our homes has always included both pre and post meeting clean up. It's a lot of work to host others in your home, and I'm grateful to each of you! In the season of COVID cleaning is even more

important. Be sure to wipe down all hard surfaces to prevent spread and provide guests with hand sanitizer and/or access to washroom with soap and clean hand towels.

- **Face Coverings** - Since our gatherings are considered a “private” gathering (similar to a set group in a workplace environment) face coverings are not mandatory, however where you are unable to physically distance guidelines recommend use of face coverings.
- **Food/Beverage** - We know eating and drinking was a crucial component of Jesus’ small group ministry with His disciples. So this one is hard, especially for a food lover like me. But recommendations to limit virus spread advise against sharing food/drink. Some options instead are to invite members to bring their own coffee/tea, serve prepackaged snacks.
- **Limiting Numbers/Creating Subgroups** - Smaller numbers mean reduced risk. Limiting numbers is particularly difficult for our groups with young families. These groups typically have total numbers of about 25 - 40 people. For the short term it may be best to multiply these groups into separate smaller subgroups. Of course this can come with it’s own set of issues. Subgroups will need mature leadership and support. Be sure to connect with me if this is an option you are considering so we can pray into this and discern the best steps forward for your group.

One obvious but helpful thought to remember through this season is that you are not alone. Jesus promises to never leave us or forsake us! We have two options when facing difficulties in life. We can allow difficulty to grow our faith and develop perseverance and mature us as disciples of Jesus or we can allow difficult times to shrink our faith and take steps towards immaturity in Christ. I challenge you to allow Jesus to grow your faith through this difficult season and to invite others to grow with you!

Please let me know if you have any further questions or seek help with points of clarification.

**In Christ,  
Greg**