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## European rabbis prepare to reopen synagogues with social-distancing rules

Jewish communities in several countries, including Germany, Austria, and even Italy, are now reading themselves to begin communal religious life again

By JEREMY SHARON MAY 7, 2020 17:25



Jewish district in Antwerp.  
(photo credit: JTA)





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Rabbis in Europe are preparing the ground to bring their communities back to synagogue following the prohibitions on communal prayer for all faiths in numerous countries on the continent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis organization, said that Jewish communities in several countries including Germany, Austria, and even Italy were now reading themselves to begin communal religious life again, although he acknowledged that things would not be the same as before.

Some states and cities in Germany have already permitted houses of worship to reopen, while in Austria they are scheduled to open on May 15.

Goldschmidt said the recommendations of the CER, the largest association of Orthodox rabbis in Europe, were that when the authorities in a particular country permit the reopening of houses of worship daily and Shabbat communal prayer services can recommence but with tight controls.

Services should be shortened, worshippers should stand two meters apart, and the congregation should not sing since singing reportedly increases the distance saliva can travel.

Torah readings should be conducted with only one person, other than the individual reading, standing at the bimah, prayer platform, the size of congregations should be limited, and only synagogues with large prayer halls should open.





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Kiddush is off the menu.

If a community has more people who wish to pray than can fit into the prayer hall with the requisite distance between them then extra services at earlier or later times should be instituted.

Goldschmidt said that congregants should also have their temperature checked upon entry, including on Shabbat when such a procedure should be performed by a non-Jew.

"It's going to be quite restrictive and difficult, and the transition period is not going to be easy," said the rabbi.

"We are going to have limited physical contact with each other, and limited possibilities to conduct religious services."

And in terms of other aspects of Jewish communal life, Goldschmidt says the reality will be different than before

"We're going to have to go back to what it was like 70 or 100 years ago, when a wedding had 30 or 40 guests not 300 or 400. Bar Mitzvas will be lower key, life cycle events in the short term will have to happen on smaller scale," he said.

One remarkable phenomenon witnessed during the coronavirus pandemic which Goldschmidt says he and his rabbinical colleagues are seeking to reinforce is the digital engagement of unaffiliated Jews in online lessons and





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video-conference prayer services.

According to the rabbi, video conference prayer services such as a Kabbalat Shabbat service staged before the beginning of Shabbat have in some communities garnered tens or even hundreds more participants than pre-corona physical prayer services in the synagogue.

Goldschmidt said that during a CER meeting on Wednesday, held by video conference, the rabbis discussed various ways of keeping virtual synagogue attendees in the physical fold, including communal meals and other initiatives once circumstances permit.

One phenomenon the rabbi is less pleased with is that of wealthy families spending large sums of money on chartering private jets in order to fly family members who have passed away to Israel for burial.

Goldschmidt says he has heard of several such cases noting that it can cost hundreds of thousands of Euros.

“From the perspective of Jewish values and Jewish law, it is possible to bury someone in their home town on condition that they are reburied at a later stage in Israel,” he noted.

“The huge amounts of money for flying a deceased family member privately would be much better invested helping poor families who have lost their livelihoods.”

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/european-rabbis-prepare-to-reopen-synagogues-with-social-distancing-rules-627268>

