

CONTINUING COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR CHURCHES

Updated May 20, 2021

In the United States, it appears that we have passed the worst of the Coronavirus pandemic. New cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are decreasing. Vaccinations are happening at a rapid pace. However, the danger is not past, and responsible citizens and organizations still need to maintain safety protocols. As has been our practice since the pandemic began, we want to keep everyone at First United Methodist Church as safe as possible. We also want to continue to be in ministry with our people, to make disciples for Jesus Christ, and to transform lives, the community, and the world with the love of God. For several weeks, we have been holding in-person worship services and small group meetings, and these have gone well with no adverse situations. On May 13, 2021, the CDC announced changing guidelines pertaining to the recommended use of face masks. We are continuing to monitor and adjust our activities such that they are in accordance with the recommendations of CDC and of those being recommended by the Arkansas Conference. The following policies are approved by the FUMC Board of Trustees for activities at the church.

ALL ACTIVITIES

- **Do not participate if**
 - you have a fever (100.4° or above),
 - feel sick,
 - have had contact with someone known to be positive for Covid-19 in the previous 14 days.
 - Note: Health authorities encourage people in vulnerable populations (over 65, chronic health conditions or compromised immune system) *who have not been vaccinated* to refrain from large in-person gatherings if possible.

- **You may participate if you**
 - are fully vaccinated as defined by the CDC with an authorized COVID-19 vaccine.

- **If you are not yet vaccinated, you may participate if you**
 - wear a mask at all times inside,
 - stay 6 feet away from people not in your family group,
 - use hand sanitizer,
 - offer air hugs and air high fives only!

- Masks are no longer required for outdoor activities.
- Hand sanitizer will be located at all entrances.
- Pre-packaged food or food prepared and served by limited and designated persons will be allowed. No family style or buffet meals or open snacks.
- If in an environment in which masking is required for those not yet vaccinated, masks may be removed while eating or drinking and then returned to the face.
- Lists of participants in worship and small groups should be kept for each activity in the event that contact tracing is necessary.
- All persons working with children and youth shall be required to wear a mask while with the children and youth without regard for their vaccination status since all children and youth have not yet had access to their protection by vaccination.

IN-PERSON WORSHIP

- We will continue to offer our services via Facebook live and YouTube at 9:00 and 11:10 and on the radio at FM 96.7 at 11:10.

- High-touch items such as hymnals, offerings plates, etc., have been removed from the worship areas.
- Holy Communion will be served with pre-packaged individualized elements.
- Worship spaces will be cleaned and sanitized after each use.
- Masks must be worn at all times in worship by those who are not yet vaccinated.
- There are offering boxes installed in each worship space to collect tithes and offerings. Worshippers may use those, or continue with mail or electronic giving.
- Worshippers will follow the directions of the guest services team/ushers in gathering, being seated, and being dismissed.

SMALL GROUP GATHERINGS

- Groups may reserve space at the church for class meetings, circles, studies, etc. Rooms will be assigned according to needs for social distancing.
- Children and youth will be allowed to meet in person, following the safety protocols of the church. Leaders of those ministries will communicate with their constituent groups.
- Child care will be provided for worship services and Sunday School, adhering to the Arkansas Department of Health safety guidelines for infants and toddlers.
- Meeting rooms will be cleaned and sanitized after each use.
- Beverages and snacks may be brought in, but safety protocols outlined above must be followed. The church can provide coffee and/or bottled water if requested.

OTHER GUIDELINES

- We will continue to monitor the local situation and guidance from the Annual Conference, State and CDC for guidelines regarding safety. Adjustments may be made as the situation warrants.
- The Board of Trustees of the church is responsible for approving these policies.
- Overnight trips for youth or young adults are not recommended.
- The Weekday School and Child Enrichment Center will follow all Arkansas Department of Health guidelines for operating child-care facilities.

This has been a strange and difficult year, but not unprecedented. God's people have faced challenges before. We are now seeing wonderful signs of hope. We continue to pray for each of you strength, patience, and health through this pandemic. We will come through this together and emerge on the other side wiser, stronger, and more focused on the mission of the church. We appreciate your faithfulness during the rough patch. If you have any questions, please get in touch with one of the pastors or staff. God bless you and keep you.

RESOURCES

- Arkansas Annual Conference guidance: <https://arumc.org/covid19>
- ADH guidance: <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus>
- CDC guidance <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>