



COVID UPDATE

JUNE 22, 2021

Church family,

We find ourselves in yet another hard place today. On the one hand we want to do as we have done for the last 18 months—keep our facilities and people as safe as possible and follow the best scientific recommendations. However, many if not most of our people who have returned to worship and small groups are vaccinated. We have felt the joy of being together and leaving those uncomfortable masks off. We are all tired of the restrictions of the pandemic. However, the situation has changed in the last few weeks:

- The Delta variant has become widespread and is more transmissible and dangerous.
- Our children are not vaccinated and are vulnerable to the new variant.
- Breakthrough cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, while still rare, are increasing, especially among 65+ ages and those with health conditions.
- The statistical parameters for Sebastian County that we have been following indicate a negative trend toward a high risk environment.
- Arkansas officials have recommended everyone at indoor gatherings wear masks.

While we don't want to cancel in-person activities at all, it does seem prudent to add back some safety precautions. Please read the statement below. While none of us who are vaccinated want to do this, it's not about us. It's about loving our neighbors, all of whom are to some extent vulnerable to this new variant of a terrible virus.

Your pastors and Trustees are monitoring the situation daily, and we will adjust our policies as conditions warrant. Keep all of us and all who are affected by the pandemic in your prayers.

God bless you,

Rev. Dr. William O. (Bud) Reeves

Dear First UMC Family and Friends,

As United Methodist, we are called to live a life that demonstrates the love of God and our neighbor in all we do...we are also called to practice 3 General Rules, the first being "do no harm."

Considering the current acceleration of Covid-19 cases brought on by the Delta Variant we are asking that everyone resume wearing masks while inside the church. We recognize that many of you have been vaccinated, but we also have many who have not. And while those who chose to be vaccinated have their countless reasons, the same is true for those who have chosen not to be vaccinated. As a community of faith, it is our job to hold everyone as having sacred worth and to keep each one safe.

The pastors and Trustees are working diligently to continue our in-person worship. However, this week the numbers for Sebastian County have risen to place us in the category to "strongly consider" pausing our in-person worship. Bishop Mueller has given us the authority to make decisions based on our local situations, so with that being said, we feel that taking the step to wear mask while indoors can help us continue having worship and Sunday school, as well as small groups. The Trustees will continue to monitor the situation daily.

All our online worship options will continue; 9 am Connexion, 11:10 am Sanctuary, and 5:30 Wednesday Chapel. While we continue to encourage families to attend together, adults who have not been vaccinated may consider attending services online to reduce risk to themselves and others. Children and youth activities will continue to observe recommended safety protocols

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Bud or DeeDee, or Larry Weir, Trustee's chair. If you have questions concerning the vaccine, we also have individuals in our congregation that would be happy to speak with you and answer any questions you may have.

Let us commit together to be in active prayer for all those infected, compromised, grieving, isolated, exhausted, anxious, and frustrated. There is no doubt we all have a myriad of feelings and emotions attached to this pandemic. May God bring healing to our world, peace to our lives, and grace in our hearts.

Grace and peace to you,

Rev. Dr. William O. (Bud) Reeves
Senior Pastor

Rev. DeeDee Atry
Executive Associate Pastor

Larry Weir
Board of Trustee Chair