

CONTINUING COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR FUMC

Updated October 18, 2021

The summer surge of the Delta variant of COVID-19 is on the wane. New cases, hospitalizations, and deaths have been on a downward trend for about a month, and the metrics that we watch in Sebastian County have been in a good range for about two weeks. Nevertheless, it is not time to act as if the virus is gone. Only about half of the eligible people in Sebastian County have been vaccinated. Those who are vulnerable are still at risk of serious illness and death. 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. We are all weary of everything having to do with the pandemic, and we are certainly tired of wearing masks in public gatherings. We believe it is time to make some adjustments to our policies. However, we will continue to monitor the situation and adjust our activities such that they are in accordance with the recommendations of CDC and of those being recommended by the Arkansas Conference. For now, 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, compromised immune system, or unvaccinated) to refrain from large in-person gatherings if possible.

- **We encourage every eligible person to get vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus. You may participate whether or not you are vaccinated if you follow the safety precautions below.**

- **If you are not yet vaccinated, the following protocols apply:**
 - Please 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!

- **If you are fully vaccinated, the following protocols apply:**
 - Masks are recommended but optional indoors. Please feel free to continue to wear masks if you are more comfortable that way.
 - Masks are optional indoors for children. As soon as children are eligible to be vaccinated, we encourage them to do so.
 - Masks are required for all unvaccinated persons working with children and youth and recommended but optional for vaccinated workers with children and youth.
 - Masks are not required for outdoor activities.
 - Masks may be removed while eating or drinking.
- 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.

- Lists of participants in worship and small groups should be kept for each activity in the event that contact tracing is necessary. Please sign in as you enter Sunday small groups and worship.

IN-PERSON WORSHIP

- For the rest of October, we will continue to offer our services in person at 8:30 (Chapel), 9:00 (Connexion), and 11:10 (Sanctuary), and via Facebook live and YouTube at 9:00 and 11:10 and on the radio at FM 103.5 at 11:10. Starting November 7, we will shift the worship times to 8:30 (Chapel) and both the Connexion and Sanctuary services at 11:00. Only the Sanctuary service will be live-streamed. The Connexion service will be broadcast later.
- Hymnals will remain in the chapel and sanctuary, but other high-touch items such as offering plates and attendance pads will continue to be 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.
- 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.

SMALL GROUP GATHERINGS

- Groups may reserve space at the church for class meetings, circles, studies, etc. Rooms will be assigned according to needs for appropriate spacing.
- Children and youth may 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 children or youth 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 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>