



# The Florida Conference

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

May 28, 2020

## In-Person Worship Optional after June 15<sup>th</sup>

The Florida Conference Re-Launch Task Force along with Bishop Carter and the Cabinet met this week and decided to allow churches to consider resuming in-person worship after June 15<sup>th</sup> on a limited basis according to the following guidelines. Before proceeding, we ask that you be sure to have read carefully and completely our [FLUMC guidelines](#), the [CDC guidelines](#), the article [“Why reopening church is different”](#), the [FAQ document](#), and the [Governor’s Plan for Florida’s Recovery](#).

**Please continue to offer on-line worship.** It is important that vital worship opportunities are readily available for people in your church who are not ready to return to your campus. Recent surveys suggest that more than 70% of your regular church attendees may choose to stay home at this time. Many of our vital churches have decided to wait and resume in-person worship until July or August and we fully support these plans.

**Our strong recommendation** is that churches consider lower risk in-person worship opportunities like **outside worship** (with appropriate social distancing, wearing masks and a consideration for heat exposure) and **drive-in worship** (with participants staying in their vehicles - [see guidelines here.](#))

## Here are seven key things to keep in mind:

1. **This guidance could change.** If the number of new cases or the infection rates begin to increase, this guidance will be revisited and further guidance will be given, including a new request for no in-person worship during a spike in cases.
2. **The decision will vary according to your church context.** Churches should carefully follow the guidance of your city and county officials and [investigate the rate of infection in your area](#). Churches should consider the state of preparedness of your church, the size of your congregation, the number of vulnerable persons in your setting, the availability of cleaning supplies, and more. The decision to resume in-person worship should be made by a team of leaders that includes the pastor.
3. **Persons in vulnerable populations (in the state of Florida this has been defined as persons over the age of 65 or those with underlying medical conditions) are encouraged to stay home.** This guidance is consistent with the guidance from the federal and state government and the CDC.
4. **At all times people must maintain at least six feet between family groups.** We believe in most indoor settings this could cap your capacity between 15% to 25% of what your space typically holds. In order to do this safely, you will need to have a registration system in place with spaces set aside for visitors.
5. **Clearly communicate the guidelines in multiple ways to every person who enters your space.** It is helpful to see this as a covenant between all participants. Guidelines should be in writing. Have clear signage as people enter spaces. Announce the guidelines at the beginning of each gathering. Have a clear plan in place for visitors and those who may not want to follow the guidelines. Be able to communicate why you are reopening should the media be present, and take pictures showing how you are following the guidelines.

6. **Remember these simple reminders:** Monitor your symptoms – Stay Home if you are sick – Wash your hands – Maintain social distance – Wear masks.
7. **Have enough cleaning supplies to [thoroughly clean your facilities before, during, between and after gatherings](#).** Items should be removed from pews, offering plates should not be passed, and communion should be served in a modified way.

**Here are three areas of higher risk that require conversation and coordination:**

1. All persons should wear a mask or cloth face covering. Not wearing a mask puts everyone around you at a higher level of risk. We address masks further in our [FAQ](#).
2. Our conference task team believes congregational singing is a higher risk activity. This is based on a high level of agreement among scientists and singing experts (view [CDC research](#) on singing). We address singing further in our [FAQ](#).
3. Ministry to children and youth in this time is a higher risk activity. Before schools reopen, it may be that many churches encourage families to worship together. Children and youth ministry must follow the [CDC guidelines](#). This will require additional volunteers, volunteers wearing masks, daily checking of temperatures, and more. Social distancing is difficult for younger children to understand. Any church planning to do children or youth ministry should send their specific plan of how they intend to follow the CDC guidelines to their District Superintendent. All children and youth ministry must also follow our [Child and Youth Protection Policy](#).

As a final reminder, outside groups who use church facilities should follow the same guidelines we have published. All outside groups must provide a certificate of insurance, which includes the local church as an Additional Insured, and sign an agreement that states their willingness to abide by these guidelines. Outside choral groups are strictly prohibited at this time.

The above and linked guidelines are the minimum requirements for Florida United Methodist Churches. Churches may add to these guidelines but may not subtract from these guidelines.