

## **CONTINUING COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR CHURCHES**

### **February 21, 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. Following the counsel of Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Bishop Gary Mueller and their teams of experts, we are ready to begin again to hold in-person worship and gatherings at the church. Every activity will not begin immediately; it will take some time to let the pandemic continue to wind down and to decide how is the best way for our church to proceed. But we are thrilled and thankful that we are beginning the process to re-open and re-invigorate the church. God has great things ahead for FUMC in Fort Smith!

The following are the protocols we will continue to follow in order to ensure the safety of our activities on the church campus.

#### **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 in-person gatherings if possible.
  
- **You may participate if you**
  - wear a mask at all times, inside and outside
  - stay 6 feet away from people not in your family group,
  - use hand sanitizer,
  - offer air hugs and air high fives only!
  
- Hand sanitizer will be located at all entrances.
- No food or beverages will be served.
- Lists of participants in worship and small groups will be kept for each activity in the event that contact tracing is necessary.

#### **IN-PERSON WORSHIP**

- We will continue to offer our services via Facebook live and Youtube at 9:30 and 11 and on the radio at FM 96.7 at 11.
- 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. Exception: when speaker or singer is leading worship. Special music will be provided by individuals or small ensembles.
- Congregational singing will be done with masks on.

- 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.
- Arrive 20 minutes before the service to allow time to process your entry.
- 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, beginning February 28, adhering to the Arkansas Department of Health safety guidelines for infants and toddlers. Children may only be left in child care for approximately an hour (enough time for the parent to attend worship).
- Meeting rooms will be cleaned and sanitized after each use.
- Beverages may be brought in, but masks must be worn except when drinking. The church can provide coffee and/or bottled water if requested. No food may be brought in.
- Time recommendations are as follows: 60 minutes if held outdoors, 45 minutes if held inside. Exception: we will continue with about 60 minutes indoors for worship services.

### **OTHER GUIDELINES**

- We will continue to monitor the local situation and guidance from the Annual Conference, State and CDC for guidelines regarding safety. If at any time we feel in-person gatherings may not be safe for the congregation, we will cancel activities.
- 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 (updated November 10, 2020): <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/covid-19-guidance-for-faith-based-organizations>
- CDC guidance (updated December 30, 2020): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-events-gatherings-readiness-and-planning-tool.pdf>
- DHS Childcare rules (updated December 23, 2020): <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/Updated-Pandemic-Requirements-12.23.2020.pdf>