

First United Methodist Church – Re-Entry Plan COVID-19

Reopening Church – Our Vision

Our First Church ministry team, our staff and our church leadership are excited about coming back to church after not being able to gather during these early months of the coronavirus. We recognize that our return is taking place not at the conclusion of the coronavirus, but while it is still a threat to our society. Offering this plan, we recognize that life and church life is not going to immediately return to what it was before COVID-19; therefore, how we live out our mission as the church will not be identical to what it was a few short months ago. This plan for restarting church is not a focus on religious freedom or personal rights, though we view them as tremendously important. This plan is focused on the commandments to love God and neighbor. John Wesley's first Simple Rule, "Do no harm" compels those of us who are Jesus' disciples shaped by the Wesleyan tradition to make sure that our actions do not harm others, even if we are not intentionally doing so. This means that we need to exhibit abundant caution and, for the foreseeable future, act to keep everyone as safe as possible and to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Church attendance is voluntary and we certainly understand that many of our church family will choose, for the time being, to continue to stay home to protect their health. We support the decisions you make and encourage all of our church family to make a decision that is best for them and that keeps them safe. Please know that we will continue to broadcast our worship services accessible on Sundays through our website (www.iopmethodist.com), Facebook (First IOP UMC) and our YouTube channel (First United Methodist Church IOP).

Plan Development

Our plan has been developed with the utilization of many resources. Not only have we taken the ideas and thoughts of our church ministry team, staff, and lay leadership, but we have also utilized guidance from our medical professionals and governmental leaders, Bishop Jonathon Holston and his cabinet, as well as a number of other churches.

Key Considerations

The safe reopening of First Church will involve at least four elements in the coming weeks and months knowing that a June 14 opening is subject to change as conditions warrant:

1. We will in as much as our setting allows, follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental

Control, Governor Henry McMaster, Bishop Jonathon Holston, and federal guidelines.

2. We will practice appropriate social distancing, appropriate sanitizing and cleansing guidelines, the wearing of masks (we will make masks available on a limited basis, but due to the shortage of PPE, we strongly encourage everyone to provide their own) and the practice of utilizing limited and clearly marked entry and exit points First Church established seating and gathering requirements.
3. Cooperation from all individuals, particularly those who are symptomatic or in an at-risk or compromised population. Please know that church attendance is voluntary, and no one should come who feels uneasy about it. Make the right choice that is best for you. Do not come if you are sick or have been exposed to a known positive case of COVID-19 unless there has been a 14 day quarantine.
4. Constant evaluation of available guidance and appropriate health data that is available. We will monitor all guidelines and take appropriate action. We believe that your best interest is God's first interest. We will implement everything we can to make sure that First Church is the safest place on the island.

Worship Service and Guidelines

First UMC will resume onsite worship services effective June 14, 2020. We will be offering three services each Sunday (Traditional at 8:30, Island Praise at 9:30, and Traditional at 11am).

Criteria and Action Steps for Worship Services

Capacity for Worship Services:

Based on guidance that suggests spacing of six feet between, in front of and behind every person to achieve safe social distancing objectives coupled with suggestions that no church nor facility allow more than 50% of maximum capacity for a gathering, we have determined that no more than 130 people can populate our sanctuary at any given time for any single gathering and no more than 75 can populate our Fellowship Hall for any single gathering. With three Sunday morning worship services, this should provide us the opportunity for up to 335 people to worship on Sunday mornings.

Usher Training:

A training session(s) will be held to train ushers on appropriate seating protocols, safe spaces, utilization of masks, maintaining closed worship space while appropriate cleaning between services occurs, seating and dismissal practices,

appropriate form of collecting offering, and how to assist those that need help while maintaining the safety measures of this plan.

Arrival, entry, seating and exit for Worship Services:

All current parking for First Church will be available for usage as it was prior to this point. It is important, however, to know that the front entrance of the sanctuary and the Fellowship Hall door via the Prayer Garden area will be the only access for our services. There will be no thru traffic or use of other church buildings to access either of these entry points. Those parked in the back parking lots will not be able to walk through the building. As you enter the parking lot, at the Administration Building entrance, you will be greeted by a parking lot attendant and asked to drive to the rear of the church. There, while in your car and under the tent, we will have our in-house medical professionals ready to take your temperature using a touchless device (a reading below 100.0 degrees is considered safe to enter) and volunteers to help you sign in and receive a name tag. Once you have received your name tag, we will invite you to park and enter through the front.

Ushers will be trained to follow a seating plan that will provide for safe and social distancing to take place. Spouses and family units that live in the same household will be allowed to sit closer than the required social distancing of six feet. Seating will utilize every other pew for safe space practices. All others will be seated at six foot intervals. All that enter will maintain safe social distancing while waiting to be seated by an usher. All that attend will be seated by an usher and dismissed by an usher. Entering the sanctuary will be down the center aisle and we will seat people in the sanctuary and Fellowship Hall from front to back. Exiting the sanctuary will be from back to front out the main door. Exiting the Fellowship Hall will be through the side doors closest to the Administration building, one family group or individual at a time.

There will be no coffee stations or First Friends gatherings at this time. Guidance advises against the gathering of small groups within a larger setting. The utilization of only worship spaces at this time also restrict those gatherings. We join our church family in the excitement of being able to worship with one another again, but we want to make certain that we greet one another in ways that joyfully acknowledge each other without physically touching or violating social distancing practices. All persons attending our services will be required to wear masks at all times with the exception of clergy and vocalists and only when they are speaking or singing. Handshakes, hugs, elbow bumps, fist bumps or physical touching outside of families living under the same roof will not be permitted.

Weekly offerings will be collected in baskets/containers placed at the exits and each individual will have the opportunity to share their offering as they leave whichever service. We encourage those attending to utilize restrooms only in the event of an emergency as spreading of viruses and bacteria is heightened in high-touch areas with water vapor and water droplets.

We will clean surfaces and utilize newly purchased disinfectant atomizer machines between all worship services to maintain a clean, sanitized and safe space for all that attend our worship services. All appropriate and deeper cleaning will take place Monday through Friday. There will be no hymnals, pens, cards, etc. of any kind in our seating areas.

Order of Worship:

All of our worship services will be shorter in length and will average 45 minutes per service. As a result of the guidance being provided on the aerosol effect of spreading germs and bacteria, we are following the guidance of our Bishop in not having congregational singing nor will we utilize a large group choir. We will provide instrumental music and a soloist, but only when they are at a 20 foot distance from the congregation, and 6 feet from each other. There will not be congregational singing of any kind at this point. Plexiglass partitions have been installed to further prevent any additional aerosol effect from the soloist or the pastor and each of those individuals will also be utilizing separate microphones at all times. The inner doors to the two worship spaces will remain open to increase air flow.

Guidelines for Small Groups, Bible Studies, Youth and Children's Activities and Sunday School Classes

Upon reopening, we will not be holding Sunday School Classes, Choir, Bible Studies, church committee and ministry meetings, youth or children's activities and other non-worship gatherings in face to face meeting style on the premises as we have become accustomed. We encourage the use of Zoom and other online programs that allow for groups to meet electronically.

Summary of Plan

Do No Harm

- If you are symptomatic, please stay home. (Fever, Cough, known exposure over previous 14 days to COVID-19)
- Stay up to date on current symptoms and illness concerns regarding COVID-19.

Social Distancing

- Six foot social distancing will be practiced for all worship services and any other church activity. Six feet from the front, back and both sides will be adhered to.
- We will not be able to have physical contact. No hugs, elbow bumps, fist bumps nor any form of physical touching.
- Family groups (each individual family living under the same roof) will be able to sit at a closer distance.
- Please plan the appropriate amount of time to arrive and to make your way to the designated entrances. Entrances and exits will be labeled and will be only one way traffic. No thru traffic via the church building will be available, so please plan appropriately. Additionally, our ushers will seat and dismiss everyone, therefore allowing time and appropriate social distancing as you wait will be important.
- We encourage use of restrooms only in the event of an emergency.

Personal Protection

- Masks will be required for all in attendance, with the exception of clergy, musicians and vocalists when speaking or singing. We encourage everyone to bring their own mask, however First Church will provide a mask for those that do not have one. Masks should be worn at all times while on church premises.
- Hand sanitizer stations will be available at the entrances, both the sanctuary and the Fellowship Hall.
- Weekly offerings will be collected in baskets/containers that will be placed at the exits and each individual will have the opportunity to share their offering as they leave the service.

Safe Spaces

- Our ushers will be trained on how to seat within the scope of this plan. The worship spaces (Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall) will utilize seating on every other pew or row.
- Congregational singing will not be a part of our worship at this time and singing by congregants is discouraged.
- There will be no coffee stations or First Friends and we discourage bringing food or drink inside of the church buildings.

□ At the present time, there will be no Sunday School classes meeting on the premises, no choir practices, no regular meetings, and no children's or youth activities held inside the church buildings. We encourage our Sunday School Classes and or ministry/committee groups to meet electronically via Zoom or other electronic means.

□ There will be no nursery or Wee Worship available for our worship services.

□ All cleaning and sanitizing protocols of this plan will be followed. The worship space will be cleaned and sanitized between each respective service.

*Unfortunately, due to these restrictions, there will not be the opportunity to meet with the pastor or members of the staff following the worship services but as always, we invite you to contact Pastor Laura or any of our staff members via email or telephone. Thank you all for your flexibility, patience, and grace as we learn to navigate worship together at First Church in the coming days!