



Great Plains United Methodist

Continued Pastoral/Congregational Guidance for Re-opening

June 26, 2020

Our journey continues, not only based on a proposed timeline, yet also on our faithfulness as we continue to discern the signs of what lies before us. The future of our new normal will continue to be dictated by COVID-19 within our Houses of Worship and communities. The non-anxious presence and leadership from clergy and laity throughout our Great Plains Conference will continue to bring healing and transformation.

We are a great network of strong communities of faith who impact our local contexts with the witness of Christ. As we begin to move towards in-person services, let us continue to be mindful of information from federal, state, and local officials. Within this document are some thoughts on returning to in-person worship which you can apply to your context and reduce the liability for your House of Worship.

Worship

- Continue holding on-line worship as you have been as many who are most vulnerable may not desire to be in a community gathering for several more months. Your creativity and diligence have been amazing during the previous months.
- When you discern the time to begin in-person worship, give permission to (and encourage) those who are most vulnerable to stay home.
- Realize that your clergy may have health risks that may require him/her to continue wearing a mask for a longer period.
- Encourage staff, volunteers, and congregants who are exhibiting symptoms or who have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 to stay home and follow state and local quarantine guidelines and requirements.
- Consider posting signs available on the CDC website in restrooms or entrances promoting protective measures and limiting the spread of germs.
- On the recommendations from both states, continue social distancing in worship. Maintain, by roping or taping off sections for seating, leaving 6 feet of distance from side to side and front to back.

- Groups sitting together must consist of a household unity until such time as state and local health officials indicate otherwise.
- If possible, consider restricting access to areas of the facility that are not in use, including any playground areas.
- Prop the entrance/exit doors of the worship space open, with greeter's present, or have the greeters open the doors for all individuals.
- Continue to place bulletins in an area for individuals to pick up as they enter.
- Consult with your leadership and state and local health officials about the appropriate time to replace Hymnals, Bibles, Prayer Books, paper, pencils back into the Worship space. Consider using overhead projectors to provide visual access to text and/or materials.
- CDC continues to study the spread and effects of the novel coronavirus across the United States. We now know that a significant portion of individuals with coronavirus lack symptoms ("asymptomatic") and that even those who eventually develop symptoms ("pre-symptomatic") can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms. In light of this new evidence, CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) **especially** in areas of significant community-based transmission. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html#studies>
- Congregational singing continues to be discouraged for a few more months. Worship leaders, soloists, band members, etc., are requested to maintain 10 feet of distance among themselves.
- Continue to wave or greet others with a simple nod of the head and words. No handshakes or hugs.
- If no other groups are in the worship space through the next week, there is no need to sanitize, if your air handler is working properly.

Sacraments

- Suspend the practice of Holy Communion until distancing recommendations are lifted, or state and local health officials indicate it is safe to do so.
- If Holy Communion is to be observed, servers are to wear masks and gloves; individuals maintain 6 feet of distancing as they come forward to receive a piece of the bread; juice is served in small individual cups.

Baptism

- Encourage families to wait until distancing recommendations are lifted.
- In this present moment, if a family insist, then only the parents and siblings of the child can be present within 3 feet of the baptismal font. Other family members must remain at 6 feet distance and maintain distancing between families and/or others present and stepping forward with the family.

Entering and Exiting the Facility

- Have the doors to the facility propped open, with greeter's present, or have one greeter open the door as a person arrive.
- Have extra cloth masks available for those who do not have one. Encourage them to take them home following worship. Please do not re-use until they have been cleaned.
- Based on the size of your worship space, know how many individuals you can comfortably place in that area for worship. Consider how you will count individuals as they enter to know when you have reached your maximum number.
- Provide a connect card to each family unit or individuals as a greeter welcomes them. Have cards filled out prior to entering the worship space and provide a place for them to place them as they are completed. Encourage the use of their personal pen or pencil or provide pencils and enough so that one is not used a second time. Allow the connection cards and pencils to remain where they are for 5 days as recommended by health officials.
- Consider the Church Center App for mobile phones, attendance, giving options, and sign-up for other groups and events can easily be handled via this app for smartphones.
- Only provide coffee, juice, or water in cups with lids and provide plastic utensils.

Finances

- Encourage on-line giving through Vanco, Church Center App, another e-donation service, or the conference office. Contact Assistant Treasurer Niki Buesing at nbuesing@greatplainsumc.org or 785.414.4202 to set up your donation through the conference.
- Consult with your leadership and local health officials about discerning when it is safe to begin passing the offering plate.

Weddings, Funerals, Confirmation, and other Large Gatherings

- Refer to your state and local health directives and recommendations. There will be some social distancing recommendations in both states for the next several months.
- Main the social distancing recommendations.
- Follow your state and local health officials' recommendations on allowing food in any form.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- For the next several months, CDC and other health officials recommend cleaning and sanitizing as you are now.
- If a room or space is not used from Sunday to Sunday, that room does not need to be cleaned or sanitized, except for soft surfaces, doorknobs, metal chairs, coffee pots, etc.
- Clean and sanitize restrooms after each event when they are used.
- Continue to clean surfaces that are touched often.

What Steps to Take with a Known Exposure in Your Facility

- Contact tracing will continue to be a need in the upcoming months. Record each person's name, phone, email address, the date, time in and time out of the facility for worship, small groups, daycare, meetings, and other events. Hold on to this information week to week. Using an app, like Church Center for example, is a great way to record attendance for worship and other events.
- Upon notification from an individual, notify your local health department, your insurance company, and your district superintendent.
- Upon notification from your local health department of a positive result from someone who has been in your facility, follow their directions. Notify your insurance company and district superintendent.
- Follow instructions from your local health department to communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality.
- Clean and disinfect the facility where the individual was.
- If this case was in a worship service, be prepared to not hold in-person services for the next 14 days.

This journey towards our new normal has been long and challenging. As the journey continues, let us continue to be people who practice doing no harm and keeping all individuals safe.

For questions, please contact Rev. Hollie Tapley, Conference Disaster Response Coordinator at htapley@greatplainsumc.org