

COVID-19 RELAUNCH PLANS

PARAGOULD FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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The physical gathering of God's people feeds our souls and strengthens us in a unique way. It is our desire and intention to return to in-person gatherings as soon as it is safe to do so. The following guidelines are offered as a roadmap for our return to in-person worship and other gatherings. These guidelines are subject to change as the situation unfolds at the direction of our staff and church leadership.

The FUMC Relaunch team met over Zoom on Tuesday, May 19 and Sunday, May 31 and recommended these plans be reviewed by the FUMC Trustees. The FUMC Trustees met over Zoom on Wednesday, June 3 and approved these plans. ARUMC Northeast District Superintendent Rev. Fleming is encouraged by our plans to begin in-person worship July 5.

In preparing these plans, we considered the recommendations from the CDC, the Governor's Office & Arkansas Department of Health, and will follow the guidelines for reopening outlined by the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church (<http://arumc.org/covid19/>). We will continue to seek guidance from these sources as it is made available.

Facilities, Equipment, Distancing

The following guidelines should be implemented until further notice.

1. Masks are to be worn by anyone who enters the building over age 10. Disposable masks are available at main entrances.
2. Hand sanitizing stations are available throughout facilities.
3. Facility is deep cleaned weekly. Common areas are sanitized daily and between services.
4. Items that could be touched by multiple persons (e.g. hymnals) have been removed.
5. FUMC will cease offering food service (e.g. coffee & donuts). Water fountains will be off limits.
6. FUMC will provide adequate supplies for healthy hygiene (e.g. hand soap, sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, etc.).
7. COVID-19 warning signs are posted at every entry including sidewalk sandwich boards on Sundays.
8. 6' social distancing should be honored during in-person church activities except for family groups.
9. FUMC will continue online streaming of worship and other ministries.
10. People age ≥ 65 and/or with underlying health conditions are safer at home.

Employee Concerns

1. Staff must follow guidelines and model best practices including wearing masks except when in private office or preaching/singing. FUMC will provide masks and gloves for staff as needed.
2. FUMC will offer flexible leave policies in lieu of COVID-19 related illness/quarantine. Each staff person should make necessary contingency plans.
3. Staff ≥ 65 years of age or immunocompromised will not be expected to work on Sundays or otherwise around groups of people.

Reopening Plans

Below is an infographic provided by the Arkansas Conference abbreviating options and plans for public worship and ministry gatherings. Further below are details regarding Paragould FUMC's specific plans for in-person ministry gatherings.

Stop the Spread
of COVID-19

Do NOT enter if you:

- Have had fever of 100.4°F or greater in the last 2 days
- Have a cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell
- Have had contact with a person known to be infected with COVID-19 in the previous 14 days.

To protect vulnerable people from COVID-19, ADH discourages you from entering if you:

- Are aged 65 or older
- Have chronic health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, lung disease and others
- Have a compromised immune system

Wear a facemask

Arkansas UNITED METHODISTS OF

CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCHES

- Churches continue streaming worship and other activities online.
- Churches continue drive-in worship and drive-through communion utilizing previous guidance.
- Churches conduct small **outdoor** study groups or Bible Studies (10 or fewer people) if CDC, ADH and the Governor's guidance** (issued May 4, 2020) are strictly enforced.



ARUMC Stage 1: May 31*

Indoor activities (groups of 10 or less) if the Governor's safety guidelines are strictly followed. There shall be NO childcare, children or youth activities. Accredited weekday childcare programs should follow their own guidelines. Stage 2 guidance will be provided by mid June.



ARUMC Stage 2

*Indoor activities (groups of 50 or less) if the Governor's safety guidelines are strictly followed.**



ARUMC Stage 3

*Indoor activities involving larger groups will be allowed. Although this stage allows for much greater flexibility, it will be essential to continue to practice safe and responsible gatherings.**

**Dates and information may be updated at any time due to orders from the Governor, ADH, CDC or Bishop Mueller.*

***<https://arkansasready.com>*



Drive-In and Outdoor Worship

1. Drive-up Holy Communion was celebrated in June using sealed, individual elements while participants remained in cars. We will consider and pursue other opportunities for outdoor worship perhaps including communion in the future.
2. The ARUMC allows for folks to gather outside in groups < 10 at a safe distance. FUMC welcomes groups to gather in this manner whether on the church lawn or at an individual's home.

ARUMC Stage 1: groups ≤ 10 begin May 31

1. FUMC will continue streaming worship and activities online. 11am service is available on AM/FM radio and local TV.
2. Individuals can begin visiting the church. Social distancing and masks are required.
3. Small groups < 10 could meet at the church, though FUMC Classrooms will not accommodate group meetings with social distancing. Meetings could gather in Sanctuary, Chapel, Fellowship Hall (Gym), or Worship Center when not in conflict with other scheduled activities.

ARUMC Stage 2: groups ≤ 50 begin July 5

ARUMC Bishop Mueller has suggested Stage 2 begin following June 28. FUMC plans to begin with groups of ≤ 50 persons on Sunday, July 5 subject to change and based on guidance by the ARUMC, CDC, and Arkansas Department of Health. Below are expectations of FUMC in-person ministries.

1. FUMC encourages elderly and vulnerable persons to worship from home. The church reopening does not imply that folks are expected to be in worship.
2. FUMC will track individuals by date who attend any in-person church event so the information can be shared should anyone who has attended an event test positive for COVID-19.
3. FUMC will continue to offer live-streaming worship. 11am service is live on AMFM radio and replays on local TV.
4. FUMC Worship Center & Sanctuary will be organized so that seating honors social distancing.
5. Worshippers will be seated front to back and exit back to front. Congregants will not be allowed to sit where they wish, but will be directed to the next available row/seat, beginning at the front. At the conclusion of the service, each row will be dismissed individually, beginning with the back row.
6. As many doors as possible will be propped open.

7. All attendees, worship participants, and leaders must wear facemasks. When a worship leader or pastor is speaking or singing, he or she does not have to wear a mask, but must maintain a distance of 12'. Onstage bands, musicians, and vocalists must be spaced accordingly.
8. No choir or congregational singing is allowed.
9. Holy Communion will be served in ways that are safe in the pews with pre-packaged, individual, sealed elements. Communion services may also be held outdoors.
10. An offering will not be collected during worship. Stationary giving boxes will be located throughout the building. Worshippers are encouraged to continue to give online or via postal mail.
11. Worship Center & Sanctuary high touch areas will be sanitized after each service.
12. Small groups (committees, teams, studies, classes) could meet in-person though FUMC Classrooms will not accommodate group meetings with social distancing. Meetings could gather in Sanctuary, Chapel, Fellowship Hall (Gym), or Worship Center when not in conflict with other scheduled activities. There is not enough space for all adult Sunday School classes to meet at 10am. It would be best if classes met others days and/or spaces including outdoors.
13. We will consider and pursue opportunities for gatherings where possible.
14. These guidelines apply to all indoor in-person gatherings (weddings, funerals, etc.).
15. With Stage 2 we will consider gatherings for Youth.
16. Children's ministries (Sunday school, nursery, children's church) will not meet in Stage 2.

Worship Attendance & Registration

- A. Worshippers must pre-register to attend services using a portal on the church's website, church's app, or calling the church office. Attendance will be capped at ~50 persons.
- B. Volunteers will compare in-person attendance to the registration roster to verify names.
- C. Worshippers who did not pre-register may attend worship if fewer than 50 individuals pre-registered.
- D. Services will be closed once the room has reached ~50 people.
- E. Attendees must wear a facemask. Those who choose not to wear a mask should worship from home.

Worship Plans

- A. When FUMC returns to in-person worship, our Sunday schedule will include 2 services: 9am Worship Center / 11am Sanctuary. As attendance increases, we will provide additional services.
- B. In lieu of corporate singing, musical elements will be offered by soloists and instrumentalists.
- C. There will be no bulletins or hymnals used. Shared texts will be projected on screens/walls.

Sanitize & Volunteers

- A. Ushers/Greeters will not serve in a typical fashion as we hope to limit in-person interaction.
- B. Clergy and staff will work with volunteers who are willing to monitor attendance and social distancing as well as sanitizing high touch areas following each service. Contact Rev. Chase if you are willing to serve in this way.
- C. Those age ≥ 65 or otherwise immunocompromised are discouraged from volunteering in this capacity.

Shifts in Ministry

FUMC should think of our new COVID-19 realities as a shift in paradigm. Some churches have reopened but in-person attendance has been minimal. Research indicates worship is a space where individuals could be more susceptible to respiratory contagions including COVID-19. Further studies suggest we may see a second wave or rolling waves or a slow wave of this virus for months to come. Which means we will be living in this COVID-19 world for a while longer. We must think carefully about what is best for our church and our community.

Our church will reopen in stages as described. Our practices and policies will reflect guidelines and recommendations. We'll minimize crowds, keep our distance, wear face masks, avoid small classes, suspend children's activities, and limit group singing. Attendance will be lower than normal. We cannot wait on this moment to pass. ***Rather, we are going to continue to adapt to this reality while being the church.*** In the coming months we will be flexible and hopeful in seeking to do ministry in different ways. Below are a few "Shifts" we need to hold in focus.

1. **Shift from Private Faith to Public Witness:** This is an opportunity for the church to lead the way as a social witness and good neighbor. Christians are called to a life of self-sacrifice and love of neighbor. We will wear our masks and keep our distance as a way to serve others. We embrace these inconveniences as tangible, public acts of love and care. We will work alongside our public officials, ARUMC Bishop, and FUMC leadership as we will lean into these inconveniences with warmth and compassion.

2. **Shift from In-church to At-home Worship:** We will continue to strengthen and emphasize opportunities for at-home worship including live-streaming, radio, and television coverage of services. Even as church reopens, many folks will need to and/or choose to worship from home. Gathering in-person for worship is preferred, but we recognize and celebrate opportunities for at-home worship in this season.
3. **Shift from Gathering to Connecting:** Churchwide community care is a priority. The entire congregation is charged with caring for one another. We encourage small groups such as Sunday school classes to maintain their sense of unity via phone calls, video chat, or through small outdoor gatherings. This also includes efforts such as with our Hospitality Team and organic ways by which members reach out to one another.
4. **Shift from Complexity to Simplicity:** In this season we need to keep church life simple and approachable. We will consolidate children's, youth, and adult ministries. We will seek to streamline church communication so as to keep the congregation up to date with church news and ministry opportunities. We will simplify in-person worship including postponing congregational and choral singing. We will explore creative and safe ways to share communion in-person. Baptism is never celebrated privately, though in this season it would need to be done so in a safe way including limiting attendance. The Witt House will continue to be a central ministry of FUMC, but we have and will continue to abridge its processes so as to serve vulnerable neighbors and promote the safety of volunteers and staff.
5. **Shift from Teaching to Equipping:** In-person faith-formation opportunities will continue to be minimal. For example, children's ministries will be some of the last to return in-person due to the inability to social distance or wear masks. The discipleship of children and youth must be a focus in the home under the care of parents and guardians. FUMC will provide weekly resources and we encourage parents/guardians to lead their children in weekly times of study, reflection, and prayer. FUMC is organizing at-home Vacation Bible School for July 13-17 including videos along with crafts and lessons to be completed and celebrated at-home. Similarly for adults, FUMC is providing discipleship resources and encourages folks to grow in their faith even in this season. With in-person study opportunities limited, we need members to take ownership of faith-formation in a new way.
6. **Shift from Counting Attendees to Engagement:** Churches track in-person attendance as a way to assess ministry success and growth. We will not measure ministry effectiveness in this way for many months. Our effectiveness will be based on engagement and growth in discipleship. These concepts are less quantifiable but no less important. We must continue to grow in depth of faith while understanding our in-person numbers will not compare with previous years.

Liabilities

FUMC Relaunch team and Trustees have consulted our insurance provider and legal support in considering our liabilities with regard to reopening our campus. The advice we have received includes recommending we thoroughly follow CDC, Arkansas Department of Health, and ARUMC guidelines for public spaces including churches. We believe our plans described above honor the suggested and required guidelines for local churches as we understand them at the current time. We will continue to monitor professional recommendations and apply them where possible so as to make our campus as safe as possible for in-person gatherings.

Sources

[Federal Gov. "Opening Up America Again" Plan](#)

[Arkansas Dept of Health "Guidelines on Reopening Places of Worship"](#)

[Arkansas Annual Conference Guidance: The Safe Reopening of Churches In Response to COVID-19](#)

[A Letter from Bishop Gary Mueller Providing Guidance to Churches. May 6](#)

Relaunch Team

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Rev. Chase Burns

Denise Chipman (Administrator)

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