

Woodlawn UMC Plan for Re-opening Our Facility
Approved by Woodlawn Executive Team on 5-7-2020

In an effort to determine what is essential to “be the church,” Woodlawn UMC begins with its **vision and mission** for achieving it. Our vision of Woodlawn as a **Christ-centered community making God’s love real in the world** does not change whenever we return to our building. Our mission to “**Shape people to be the heart, hands and feet of Jesus**” continues to be our primary objective as we determine what we will do, what we could do, and what we can leave undone in the future.

As we seek to fulfill our mission, we covenant together to uphold Wesley’s three general rules for Methodists:

1. **Do no Harm** (to the Body of Christ, to others, or to self)
 - What practices ensure the safety and well-being of all?
 - What practices best ensures our own safety and well-being?
 - What practices build up the body of Christ and the repute of the Christian faith?
 - What brings harmony to the body, and heals division?

2. **Do Good** (to others, as we would have them do to us)
 - How will we be a good neighbor to those in our community?
 - How will we ease suffering?
 - How will we offer Christ to others?
 - How will we care for the sick and the lonely?

3. **Attend upon all the ordinances of God** (so as to strengthen our relationship with Christ)
 - Worship
 - The Lord’s Supper (monthly, quarterly at the least)
 - Personal and Corporate Prayer (A prayer guide and mid-week prayers)
 - Searching Scripture (Classes for all ages)
 - Christian Fellowship (Groups for all ages for encouragement and accountability)
 - Other Spiritual Disciplines such as fasting, journaling, giving, and faith-sharing.

Many of us may have had mental images of returning all at once to our churches in celebration and large assemblies, we now recognize that to return safely we must do so in stages. It will not be a matter of following a timetable, but discerning the appropriate steps to take at the appropriate times and responding accordingly.

We face difficult decisions as we seek to do no harm. If our behaviors are not planned and well-executed, a new wave of infections and deaths will likely occur. If we reopen our buildings and resume gatherings prematurely, we will surely force our more vulnerable members to choose between keeping themselves and others healthy and participating in life of the congregation.

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Experts suggest that it is possible that we could move back and forth between stages should subsequent infections begin to increase. The advice of public health officials may change as more becomes known about COVID-19.

During the shelter in place order, Woodlawn UMC implemented these baseline practices which continue presently:

- The building is locked and unavailable to the public.
- Worship services are held online only, with participants recording from home.
- Classes for study, prayer and fellowship meet online only.
- Meetings for decision making and administration meet online only.
- Staff meet online only.
- Pastoral care is limited to phone and online methods of contact.
- Neighborhood Care Units are encouraged to act as calling trees.
- Funerals and weddings in the building are suspended.
- Minimal, drop-in staffing sufficient for essential operations is allowed. (deposits, mail processing, etc).

Reopening Woodlawn UMC Facilities will occur in **three stages**.

The decision to enter each stage will be made by the Pastor, Associate Pastor, and Lay Leaders (Lay Leader, Lay Leader Apprentice, Executive Team Chair, and Executive Team Apprentice)

Teams will be formed to determine all implementation strategies and procedures. Teams may be formed for worship, staffing and administration, building use, small groups, youth, and children as well as any other areas as deemed necessary.

❖ Stage One

Begins no sooner than following two weeks of an overall decline in the number of new infections reported in Sedgwick County, widespread availability of testing, contact tracing and no PPE shortages. In this phase:

- Entrances will remain locked so as to control who enters the building.
- Church continues holding online worship services only.
- Worship may be recorded in the sanctuary, with fewer than ten present, maintaining at least 6 feet of space between people. Group singing will not be allowed.
- Weddings and Funerals will be permitted only for groups of less than 10 in attendance, maintaining appropriate distancing. Masks will be worn if suggested by public health department. Scheduling of weddings and funerals will depend upon the church's ability to clean and disinfect all areas used before next use.
- Serving food before or after weddings or funerals will not be permitted.

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- At this time, small groups, committees and other uses of the building will be prohibited so as to limit the areas of the building which must be cleaned and disinfected.
 - Office functions and staffing will continue to be limited to ensure only essential operations. Those in the office will wear masks. Surfaces and equipment including phone and computers will be regularly disinfected.
 - High risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, will be asked to consider sheltering at home.
 - Pastoral Care will continue to be conducted by phone and online methods for those who are ill and those convalescing or seeking medical treatment.
 - Pastors may meet with persons in small groups to plan weddings and funerals. All will wear masks if suggested by public health department.
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❖ Stage Two

The shift from Stage One to Stage Two is based on a re-evaluation of the situation, and will be considered only after an additional two to four weeks of decline in the number of new infections in Sedgwick County are reported. Careful observance of physical/social distancing recommendations will be necessary and ongoing.

- **Worship:**
 - One service in each of our Worship areas will be held, on two different days so as to not over fill the building with people. Each assembly will be limited to 50 persons and appropriate distancing protocols must be followed.
 - All will be asked to wear face masks if it is recommended in public spaces.
 - All surfaces must be disinfected following each service before next use.
 - Online worship will continue. Service may be pre-recorded early in the week, or recorded on Saturday evening and premiered on social media on Sunday morning.
 - Small group worship in homes with proper distancing may be encouraged.
 - Communion: Will continue to be offered monthly online. On-site Communion may be implemented as safer practices can be determined. Anyone desiring more frequent communion may meet with a pastor privately.
 - Music will be limited to recordings, instrumental music or solo singers. Congregational and group singing will be prohibited. Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading droplets/aerosols which can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air.
 - Greeting time will be removed from the order of service.
 - Collection plates will be placed at entrances and not passed.
 - Bibles and Hymnals will be removed.
 - No bulletins will be handed out. Screens will direct people through worship.
 - Children's time will be addressed to the entire congregation and children will not come forward.

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- People will be required to spread out, six feet between family units, with empty rows between families.
- Coffee and food will not be served, so as to discourage mingling.
- Weddings and Funerals may take place with careful attention to limit attendees to 50 or less.
- Serving food before or after weddings or funerals will not be permitted.

- Small Groups and Faith Formation:
 - Small groups and classes of fewer than 50 adults or youth (6th grade and older) may meet in person *only* with appropriate distancing for the space allotted. Rooms will have maximum capacity determined which allows for six foot spacing between occupants.
 - Online resources for meeting will continue for all ages.
 - Any group must disinfect all surfaces of space used following its meeting.
 - Groups may be limited on which days and hours they will be permitted to assemble.
 - Groups of children younger than 6th grade will *not* be permitted on site—including children’s classes, groups and nurseries.
 - Special events for youth whether on-site or with travel may occur only if they can be completed meeting all gathering and distancing protocols.

- Pastoral Care
 - Phone and online methods will continue to be the primary ways pastors will provide care for the ill, those convalescing, seeking medical treatment, or living in care facilities.
 - Pastors may meet with persons in small groups to plan weddings and funerals. All will wear masks if suggested by public health department.

- Church Business
 - Entrances will be unlocked during office hours.
 - Portions of the building may be locked or blocked from use.
 - Regular office functions resume while maintaining social distancing and wearing masks if public health requires.
 - Staff will continue to regularly clean and disinfect office surfaces and equipment..
 - Church councils and leadership teams may meet in person while wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.
 - Options to include those unable to participate in person should be available. (Zoom, telephone, etc.)
 - Building users/renters may resume operations on a case by case determination, with each responsible for the cost of cleaning and disinfecting spaces used. All must agree to observe gathering and distancing protocols in this document.

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- General Building
 - Post signs indicating COVID-19 symptoms and urge people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
 - Restroom availability may be limited.
 - Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes.
 - Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces. (Will we need additional custodians?) (Is Bethany available for daily disinfecting?)
 - Create a communication and management plan for when we become aware that someone in our building is infected with COVID-19 and cooperate fully with contact tracers.

 - High risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, will be asked to consider sheltering at home.
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❖ Stage Three

The shift from Stage Two to Stage Three is based on a re-evaluation of the situation, and will be implemented no sooner than following 4 or more weeks of improving conditions in Sedgwick County, zero new cases reported in the county, and/or the lifting of public precautions. It is possible that conditions will not improve, but infections will increase again. In that case, physical distancing recommendations would need to be tightened again in order to get back on track. Progress may not be linear. Continue to encourage people to stay at home if they have any symptoms of illness, and to cooperate with contact tracers if they are diagnosed.

- High risk individuals (people over 60 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, will be asked to consider sheltering at home even during Phase Three.

- Wear cloth face masks while at church and in community ministry, if suggested by public health department.

- Worship:
 - Physical distancing may not be *required* by Stage Three, but space should be provided for anyone who wishes to self-distance. Avoid crowding in the sanctuary. Multiple services will be offered, allowing room for those want to spread out.
 - Woodlawn will follow public health recommendations for Communion.
 - We will follow public health recommendations on group singing as we arrive at this stage. Re-introduce congregational singing only if it is determined to be safe to do so.
 - Church may continue to use no-touch alternatives for greeting, collecting offering and worship materials.
 - Sunday breakfast may be reinstated if it is safe to do so.

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- Bible studies and small groups may be permitted to meet in person. Some online options for high risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in public will be maintained.
- Children's care, classes and groups may be permitted to meet.
- Office functions resume as normal, with attention to cleaning.
- Groups, teams, and committees may meet in person.

Questions Implementations Teams may need to answer:

- ⇒ Will we provide masks in addition to sanitizer for staff, for others who enter our building?
- ⇒ How do we decide group limits? Turn away? Tickets? Invitations?
- ⇒ Will Ushers and Greeters need retrained?
- ⇒ How will each space be configured for family groups sitting 6 feet apart?
- ⇒ How will online service need to adjust when there is also in-person worship happening?
- ⇒ How will we discourage mingling after worship services or classes?
- ⇒ Nurseries and children's groups...toileting, handwashing, etc. (KDHE Guidelines)
- ⇒ How will we ensure sanitation and disinfection in regards to spaces?
- ⇒ How will supplies be provided for groups to clean up after themselves?
- ⇒ Do we have enough cleaning staff and availability? How do we increase our capacity to clean and disinfect?
- ⇒ Disinfecting areas where small groups gather during the week
 - Room, tables, chairs
 - Restrooms
 - Pews or chairs following worship
 - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in your building
- ⇒ If someone who has been in our building contracts COVID-19, how will we do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- ⇒ Check with our insurance company for guidance on building use and programs.
- ⇒ If someone contracts COVID-19, how will we communicate with the congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual while maintaining privacy and pastoral care?
- ⇒ How will we communicate building use requirements with outside groups?
- ⇒ What is Annual Conference position and timeline?

(Bishop Saenz, letter 4-27-2020) For now, churches with an average worship attendance of more than 50 should continue to hold online worship services and record from home or the sanctuary with a small group of people. If a church chooses to have multiple services, several preparations must be made. There must be a plan for managing the number of people per service and a plan to safeguard contact behaviors and rituals (seating, communion, baptism, passing offering plates, singing, fellowship, passing the peace, after-church receiving lines, handing out bulletins, etc.). Churches that choose to gather must

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provide personal protection equipment such as gloves, masks and hand sanitizer, and disinfect surfaces between services.

A plan should carefully consider the safety of children in nursery care, and there should be a plan for informing the congregation about the scheduling of different worship times, restrictions, and expectations. There will come a time when all gathering-size restrictions are lifted. However, we must anticipate that our lives and timelines will be shaped for at least the next year by the behavior of COVID-19. If at any time within a recovery stage COVID-19 cases significantly rise, a reversal to the previous step may be necessary. When we do meet, we will practice public safety recommendations for safe distancing, disinfecting spaces, and for other contact behaviors particular to the church-gathering experience. The directed health measures we take are meant to ensure the safety of our congregations, especially our older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions who might be at higher risk. I do not want to increase fear, but gathering in closed quarters, singing, our contact rituals, and decreased ventilation in our gathering spaces creates a ripe environment for viral transmission. I strongly urge you to err on the side of caution.

To gather in person or not for worship at this time is not a matter of faith vs. faithlessness, or about some conspiracy to suppress Christianity; this is about honoring and doing our part individually and collectively to protect God's sacred gift of life, especially for the most vulnerable in our communities and our world. Understand your insurance's liability and coverage policy in the event an outbreak is linked to a gathering of your local congregation. Check with your local health officials, and look to our conference website for continual updates regarding church gathering guidelines and recommendations at www.greatplainsumc.org/coronavirus.

Resources:

Great Plains Best Practices for Returning to our Houses of Worship http://gp-email.brtaapp.com/files/cong_excel/coronavirus/re-open+guidelines+4.29.30.pdf

Bishop Saenz letter to Clergy, April 27, 2020. Great Plains Annual Conference, UMC. <http://gp-email.brtaapp.com/files/bishop/letter+from+bishop+saenz+4.27.20.pdf>

KDHE Statement for Churches and Faith Based Organizations, April 3, 2020. <https://www.coronavirus.kdheks.gov/240/Churches-Faith-based-Organizations>

Interim Guidance from KDHE concerning child care facilities: <https://www.coronavirus.kdheks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/144/Interim-Guidance-for-Child-Care-Facilities-Licensed-by-the-KDHE-PDF---4-14-20>

Why Getting the US Back to Normal in the Next Couple Months is a Fantasy. PBS NewsHour, April 20, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-getting-the-u-s-back-to-normal-in-the-next-couplemonths-is-a-fantasy>

The Coronavirus in America: The Year Ahead. New York Times, April 18, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/health/coronavirus-america-future.html>

COVID-19: Now I understand King's truth of the 'inescapable web of mutuality', Zachary Helton, Baptist News Global, April 21, 2020. <https://baptistnews.com/article/covid-19-now-i-understand-kings-truth-of-the-inescapable-web-of-mutuality/#.XqGXyMhKg2w>

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Church in these “VUCA” Times. Jake Morrill.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uAKQXagwms&feature=youtu.be>

24 Questions Your Church Should Ask Before People Return. Ken Braddy, Jr.

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-peoplereurn/>

The Four Spaces of Belonging. <https://bensternke.com/the-four-spaces-of-belonging>

It’s Time to Ask Critical Questions About the Post-COVID19 Church. John Thornburg, United Methodist Insight, April 14, 2020. https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-future/leaders-it-s-time-to-askcritical-questions-for-post-covid-1/?fbclid=IwAR2LlnL3uVvLk5SAi47vAi_ogQuiL-yMyA4d5NwyOmSNFnuU4jyL8Rx2Iw

Distributed Church. Fresh Expressions. <https://freshexpressionsus.org/distributedchurch>

How to Seize this Moment for Your Church. Ed Stetzer.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/relaunching-church-how-to-seize-this-momentfor-your-church.html>