

**Report to Church Council
from the
Reopening Church Team
Presented June 3, 2020; Amended June 7, 2020**

I. Background

At a May 12, 2020 meeting of the Faith Formation area (one of the four FACE divisions of our church committees), a team was created to address issues related to how and when corporate worship and other activities are resumed at Washington Street United Methodist Church (WSUMC) following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March, 2020. Members of this group, the Reopening Church Work Team (RCT), were tasked with formulating a plan to present to Church Council.

Members of the RCT include:

- Sam Waldrep, Chairperson - Faith Formation Coordinator
- Patricia Parrish - Senior Minister
- Robbie Douglas - Business Administrator
- Dwight Dockery - Director of Music
- Lynn Shirley - Trustees Chairperson
- Charlotte Broome – Worship Coordination Team Leader
- Licia Jackson – Education Team Leader
- Ricky Rowe – Church Council Chairperson

The RCT met on May 21, May 28, June 1 and June 7. A variety of resources were made available to the group, including the Reset | Restart | Renew | document issued by the South Carolina United Methodist Church Conference on May 15, 2020.

The WCT adopted the following guiding principles in the conduct of its work:

- Because WSUMC is a congregation that has a significant number of members who are 65+ and/or have underlying medical conditions, the health, safety and welfare of our congregation is a top priority.
- We need to make the best decision/s for our church family.
- The finances of the church are important but are not the driving force in this decision-making.
- Restarting is a process that we do not want to rush.
- The team should be thorough in its work and well educated in the issues as recommendations are made.
- Our plans should be communicated clearly with our members.
- It is important to remember that some members of our congregation may share different opinions than us concerning reopening.

The RCT agreed that the restart date for WSUMC will be determined by our readiness and preparations, an analysis of local and state data related to COVID-19 trends, and any appropriate governmental directives. Additionally, a survey of active WSUMC members, conducted from May 22 through May 29, 2020, advised the work of the RCT. Eighty responses were received and evaluated by the team. The survey results validated the approaches taken by the RCT.

The RCT concluded that if circumstances change related to the spread of the virus, plans should be altered. The initial steps toward reopening should also be carefully evaluated after implementation and adjustments made accordingly.

Finally, it was acknowledged by the RCT and validated by the congregational survey that WSUMC has made significant strides in its virtual worship offerings during the last three months. We will continue to provide and invest in alternative worship opportunities for those members who are uncomfortable with attending in-person worship. The Worship Design Team is evaluating these online offerings and assessing ways to continue and strengthen our virtual presence.

II. Proposed Schedule for Reopening

The RCT proposes the following plan for reopening:

- Phase 1: Initially, the restart focus will be on a single worship service in the sanctuary and no other concurrent activities or meetings.
- Phase 2: The restart of in-person on-site Sunday School, small groups, children's and youth activities, committee meetings, etc. will occur after Labor Day. Strong emphasis will be placed on having concurrent virtual options as we restart these activities.

The specific schedule for reopening will be:

Wednesday, July 1, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. – *Sanctuary Open for Prayer*

We would need pews marked with entrance and exit protocols in place by this date. Sanitizers and masks should be available at the Bull Street entrance and in the narthex.

Wednesday, July 8, 15, 22, and 29 at 6:00 p.m. and August 5, 12, 19, and 26 (time to be determined) – *Live In-Person Worship*

We will adhere to the protocols described below. Beginning with this service, a very simple worship liturgy will be followed, using a balance of instrumental hymnody and compositions, prayers, lessons, and proclamations. This Wednesday 6:00 p.m. service will be re-evaluated at the end of July, including its being held on Wednesday versus Sunday, the time of the service, and its content.

The virtual service will be released on Sunday mornings at 8:00 a.m.

III. Protocols for Worship While Social Distancing

The following protocols are recommended for worship at WSUMC while social distancing:

- The aisles will be marked with directional arrows, and the narthex and will be marked with social distancing floor stickers, which will be placed six feet apart.
- The pews will be clearly marked providing for two empty pews between each family unit to allow for social distancing.
- The entire center section of pews near the Marion Street aisle will be closed, since those seats are adjacent to the center section on the garden aisle.
- Since the aisles are not six feet wide, congregants will not be seated directly across from each other from the garden aisle. Available pews will be marked in a diagonal pattern, which provides for additional distance between church members.
- This plan provides for 18 available pews. Additional seating may be provided as needed through live-streaming in Christ Chapel.
- Congregants will be seated by the ushers, and the ushers will be trained in this process. Ushers will also direct folks out of the Sanctuary using the front sanctuary doors (or closest available due to planned door repair work) on Washington Street, one pew at a time, following the service.
- Bulletins/worship guides will not be handed out but will be available in a basket.
- Collection plates will not be passed but will be placed in strategic spots within the sanctuary and the narthex; on-line giving will be promoted.
- It will be mandatory that church members wear masks while in the building. Masks will be available should congregants arrive without them. Hand sanitizer will also be available in prominent locations throughout the building.
- The restrooms will be monitored, and only one person will be allowed in at a time. The main hallway restroom, the handicapped restroom, the CDC restroom and the Prayer Room restroom will be available for congregants. The choir room restrooms will be reserved for staff. Since the congregation is exiting onto Washington Street, the hallway doors next to the church office will be open should anyone need to re-enter the building for a restroom.

IV. Cleaning, Sanitizing and Other Protocols

In order to ensure that church staff is properly preparing for the initial opening and ongoing activities, we have consulted the Centers for Disease Control's Reopening Guidance for

Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes. The following protocols will be followed:

- The sanctuary pews will be wiped down and sanitized before and after services.
- All sanctuary pew materials such as hymnals, cards, and pens/pencils will be removed in order the limit touchable.
- All primary touch points such as doorknobs, handles, counter tops, tables, railings, etc. will be wiped down before and after services.
- Hand sanitizing stations will be made available at several prominent locations throughout the campus.
- For anyone needing a face mask, the church will have them available.
- Restroom usage will be limited to the first floor only. All handicapped-accessible and non-accessible restrooms will be clearly designated and monitored to ensure proper distancing can be maintained. All restrooms will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before and after services.
- Directional signage will be paced throughout the campus, especially in high traffic areas, to ensure ease of movement and to encourage as little physical contact as possible.
- Signs will be posted in common areas, restrooms, and entry ways to remind people of social distancing, hand sanitizing, and hand washing.
- Access to non-common areas such as the breezeway leading to the choir room, stairwells, elevator, classrooms, offices, the CDC, and meeting rooms will be limited and ingress points will be clearly marked.
- The Memorial Garden and the Christ Chapel Courtyard will be made accessible.

V. Music Protocols for Worship

Although music and singing are central to the function and role of corporate worship, science tells us that singing presents an especially high rate of spreading COVID-19 due to aerosolized particulates. Therefore, the current best practice is to avoid singing in groups; this will manifest as no congregational or choral singing until such time that it is deemed safe by forthcoming scientific studies. Soloists and non-wind instrumental music will be utilized when possible and practical, and if it is possible that recordings of choral music made separately become possible, this will be implemented as well. Any hymnody presented in worship will be done so as a time of meditation/silent reflection rather than as corporate singing.

VI. Reopening for Small Groups: Phase 2

Several challenges exist as we prepare for Phase 2 of reopening small groups:

- A large segment of the teachers for children and youth are either 60+ and/or immune compromised.
- Some classrooms do not provide for comfortable distances among those in the room.
- For ages sixth grade and up, the use of any technology to deliver parallel in-person and remote classes will require additional hardware, devices, internet speed, and technical support.

Phase 2 recommendations include:

- In-person on-site Sunday School classes for adults, children and youth will not reopen until after Labor Day.
- If the number of children in current classes or the availability of teachers is scarce, second through fifth grade classes could be combined into one group (at least initially); a similar plan could accommodate youth from sixth through twelfth grades.
- A combined in-person and remote participation for second grade and up would be beneficial.
- We should investigate technologies that can be used to extend the classrooms remotely.
- Youth should be identified who are knowledgeable or are willing to be trained to act as IT assistants during the Sunday School hour.

Recommendations for other in-person on-site small groups (adult groups, children and youth activities, UMW circles, church committees, etc.) are at least several months from any implementation. We will continue to formulate strategies to address these needs as we monitor changes in the virus transmission and assess upgrades to WSUMC's technology.

VII. Communications

Communications should be guided by:

- The feedback we receive in the congregational survey;
- Clear and concise, but welcoming, messaging;
- Multiple strategies to reach as many people as possible; and
- Targeting both our membership and the general public (potential visitors).

Specific planned strategies will include:

- Posters displayed throughout the inside the building;
- Use of our two A-frame signs for posting instructions outside at the parking lot and sanctuary doors;
- Developing a carefully and sensitively worded targeted mailing to older members and those with underlying health conditions or who may be immuno-suppressed.
- Publicizing reopening plans in the bi-weekly eblasts;
- Prominent display on the WSUMC website;
- Using Facebook:
 - List at the top of our page; and
 - Running ads (\$1/day)
- Using Instagram; and
- Developing a YouTube video with reopening information and instructions.

Note: *The following issues were not considered by the RCT and will be addressed by the parties noted: reopening the church office (Staff Parish Relations Committee), ongoing CDC matters related to reopening (CDC Board and church administration), use of our facilities by outside groups (Trustees), and conducting weddings and funerals (Senior Minister and Worship Coordination Team).*