

Bethesda UMC Re-Entry Stage 3 – Final (June 22, 2021)

Preamble:

According to the update to Montgomery County COVID-19 policy, as of May 28, 2021, businesses and houses of worship may open fully without restriction. Guidance from the Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC) of the United Methodist Church reminds us to continue to err on the side of safety rather than expediency as we reopen our buildings and resume our gatherings. As we move into Stage 3 of the Bethesda United Methodist Church (BUMC) reopening plan, we give thanks to God that we are able to safely join in worship and fellowship as we maintain some adjustments to pre-pandemic life in order to protect the health of all participants.

The United Methodist Church strives to be a safe and nurturing place for all of God's people. As we gradually re-emerge from the pandemic, we welcome and celebrate each one of you who wishes to return to our building for worship, meetings, or other activities. We also request those of you who have not been vaccinated to continue the health and safety practices of mask-wearing, physical distancing, and frequent hand washing or hand sanitizing so that we may work together to protect the most vulnerable among us.

We are so glad you are here!

This document supersedes previous versions of the BUMC reopening plan.

Stage 3

Stage 3 of the BUMC reopening plan is a step-wise process for getting us reintegrated into worship and community. Listed below are the dates and details for each step of the plan. Some items will remain consistent throughout and for the foreseeable future.

All steps

- Worship services will continue to be livestreamed so that people may participate virtually.
- Where possible, options for virtual attendance will be incorporated into activities where others are gathering in person.
- Disposable masks will be available for those who arrive without a mask and need or request one. Unvaccinated people should wear a mask at all times while on church property.
- Hands-free sanitizing stations are available in the narthex.
- Pre-registration for worship or other events and completion of the "Day of" questionnaire are discontinued.
- Seating will not be pre-assigned, but worshippers are asked to maintain distancing of at least 3 feet from those not in their household.
- Signs are posted listing the symptoms of COVID-19. Anyone with these symptoms or signs of other illness should stay home and not participate in in-person worship or other activities.
- Facilities will continue to be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- CDC guidelines will be followed for any unspecified activities.

Stage 3, Step 1: Moving the process forward – June 13, 2021

Worship services

- Worship services may resume indoors or outdoors without restrictions on the number of participants.
- Worship leaders may be unmasked in the chancel area while speaking (but not singing).
- Worshippers will be required to be masked while on church property.
- Musicians may perform in the chancel area, including singing hymns or anthems while masked.

- Singing by worshippers is permitted (while masked).
- Children of all ages are always welcome in worship. At this time we are not offering nursery or childcare services during worship.
- Communion is served using prepackaged communion elements.
- Offerings may be placed in the box in the narthex. Other options for giving are printed in the bulletin and on the church website.
- To space out the arrival of people and reduce crowding in the Narthex the suggested arrival time is no more than 30 minutes before the service. There is no requirement to disperse within any given time period.

Facilities

- Restrooms are labeled for use by one person at a time. Parents may accompany their children if needed or caregivers may assist another person of their household

Gatherings

- Coffee hour/fellowship gatherings at the church will be outdoors and use pre-packaged or individual serving items (e.g., fruit in individual cups, cupcakes). Participants will remain masked except while eating and maintain physical distancing of at least 3 feet.
- Children's events may resume indoors with masks for children and adult volunteers.
- Physical distancing of three (3) feet should be maintained at all gatherings.

Stage 3, Step 2: Taking the next faithful step – July 4, 2021

The following changes are included in Step 2.

- Masks are optional at outdoor events, except when singing.
- Social distancing should be respected at all times, especially for people uncomfortable with closer contact.
- All fully vaccinated worship leaders may be unmasked in the chancel area, including singing while maintaining physical distancing.
- Congregation will continue to be masked before, during and after worship service while indoors.
- For other gatherings outside of worship and coffee/fellowship hours, masking is optional for fully vaccinated people, indoors or outdoors. Group leaders should be sensitive to all attendees' comfort level regarding masking.
- For indoor events with children and youth under 12, masking and distancing is still required for all participants (regardless of age or vaccination status). This includes the children's message during worship services.

Stage 3, Step 3: Gaining confidence – August 8, 2021

The following changes are included in Step 3.

- Fully vaccinated worship leaders in the chancel area may sing unmasked without physical distancing requirements.
- Outdoor worship services may include unmasked singing by the congregants.
- Coffee hour/fellowship gatherings may be held indoors in the Fellowship Hall with participants maintaining physical distancing while eating.

Stage 3, Step 4: Ready for full return – September 5, 2021

The following changes are included in Step 4.

- Masks are optional for fully vaccinated people at all events except where CDC guidelines recommend otherwise.
- Masks are optional at indoor worship; singing is allowed by all worshippers.
- Activities for children and youth will follow school guidance for indoor and outdoor activities.
- Fellowship time may be offered in the Narthex.