

# A Model for Returning to In-Person Activities at Bethesda UMC

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For at least the next year, we anticipate our lives to be shaped by the timeline set by COVID-19. We face difficult choices between conflicting needs, wants and imperatives. We anticipate that we will be continuously evaluating what worship, small groups and all other church functions look like.

Our process will not move in a linear fashion, but will be a process of gradual opening and evaluation for the foreseeable future. Additionally, as new information emerges about COVID-19, our guidance and practices may change in order to promote the safety of all BUMC congregants. We will at all times be guided by the currently available medical advice and best practices as we seek to maintain a safe environment for BUMC congregants and staff.

## **Reopening Criteria**

In determining the stages of reopening at BUMC, we will use several sources:

- 1) MD government advice to include Montgomery County Council and county health department, which includes local rates of COVID-19 transmission: (<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/RightNav/Coronavirus-data.html>)
- 2) CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidance, including those published for faith-based communities
- 3) Guidance from the Bishop and Baltimore Washington Conference

The pastors in consultation with church leaders will utilize the above guidelines and our own judgment to help determine when, and how, to promote safety in reopening BUMC while actively monitoring local transmission rates of COVID-19. If at any point, we feel that we need to revert back to an earlier stage/phase in order to preserve the safety of our congregants, we will do so.

We recognize that some of our congregants have underlying health issues or risk factors. When re-opening, we will keep their health and safety at the forefront. Persons with high risk factors for contracting COVID-19 should consider staying home (at least through Stage One). We will nonetheless strive to promote safe, in-person worship experiences for all that do not discriminate against persons with disabilities or high-risk conditions.

## **CDC Guidance for Faith-Based Communities**

The CDC guidance for faith-based communities in particular, has changed substantially over the past few months, and will likely continue to change as new evidence emerges about COVID-19. The CDC's most recent guidance (as of July 16, 2020), provides the following guiding principles for re-entry:

**Lowest risk:** Virtual-only activities, events, and gatherings.

**More risk:** Small, outdoor, in-person gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).

**Higher risk:** Medium-sized in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.

**Highest risk:** Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

At a minimum, BUMC's decisions about stages and guidelines will abide by county and state guidelines for in-person activities at any stage and may be even more restrictive than current local practices due to concern for the number of high-risk individuals who are part of our community. Thus, the descriptions of each BUMC re-entry stage will likely be different than those of Montgomery County, for example. Physically distancing measures, handwashing and masks would also continue to be implemented for BUMC activities for the foreseeable future.

### **Becoming Aware of Someone Who Is Sick (Applicable at All Stages):**

If the pastors and staff become aware of someone in the church who has become ill DURING an in-person gathering, we will activate our "Illness Response Protocol" per CDC guidance (with modifications) below:

- ◆ Advise staff and congregants who have symptoms of COVID-19 or who have tested positive for COVID-19 not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.
- ◆ Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 during hours of operation, and ensure that children are not left without adult supervision.
- ◆ Have designated people to attend to someone who has become ill.
- ◆ Ensure all persons attending to someone who becomes ill during a gathering have access to a filter mask, gloves, and protective eyewear.
- ◆ Establish procedures for the transport of anyone who becomes sick at the facility to his/her home or to a healthcare facility by calling 911 if appropriate.
- ◆ Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use the area until after cleaning and disinfection (the bathrooms, for example, should not be entered/cleaned until 24 hours after the sick person has left the bathroom).
- ◆ The pastors or designated group leaders, in consultation with medical personnel on site, may decide to immediately end any in-person activities and strive to dismiss attendees in a safe and orderly fashion.
- ◆ After all immediate/necessary actions have been taken, the involved BUMC personnel will conduct a brief "after-action report" (loosely defined as an informal discussion to ask what went well, what did not go well, what could be improved upon in the future) while also determining whether to hold future gatherings.

If the pastors and staff become aware of someone in the church who has become ill AFTER the worship gathering has ended, we will:

- ◆ Immediately notify local health officials (Montgomery County Health Department, 240-777-1779) if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility.

- ◆ Communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by doing the following:
  - + We will protect the infected congregant's identity at all times.
  - + Advise those exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to follow CDC guidance and contact their primary care provider for further questions or concerns.
- ◆ BUMC staff will also conduct a brief "after-action report" in this instance (see above).

## **General Cleaning Protocols**

The virus, based on current science, can survive for a period of time in the air.

Specific cleaning protocols will also differ by stage and will reference the following areas in the church building. The following cleaning protocols will apply at least to Stage One and Two.

### **Bathrooms**

- ◆ Only one person shall be allowed to use the bathroom at a time.
- ◆ The doors on the stalls in the bathrooms will be removed.
- ◆ Persons will be encouraged to close the toilet lid when flushing.
- ◆ Persons will be encouraged to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds after using the bathrooms.
- ◆ During worship gatherings in the sanctuary, a volunteer bathroom attendant will wipe down high-touch surfaces in between bathroom use (this may be expanded to include a hired staff member as the number of congregants allowed in the sanctuary increases).
- ◆ Hand sanitizer will be available when persons exit the bathroom.
- ◆ The cleaning staff will be instructed on how to clean the high-touch surfaces at the end of each day on days when there are gatherings for in-person worship or small group meetings.

### **Sanctuary/Gathering Spaces/Narthex/Meeting Rooms**

- ◆ The cleaning staff will be instructed on how to clean the high-touch surfaces at the end of each day, at each utilized location when there are gatherings for in-person worship or small group meetings.

### **Offices**

- ◆ The cleaning staff will be instructed on how to clean (especially the high-touch surfaces) once weekly as previously designated.
- ◆ The pastoral and administrative staff shall have enough supplies (i.e. wipes) to wipe down their respective spaces (particularly the high-touch surfaces) daily.
- ◆ The pastoral and administrative staff shall be encouraged to wipe down their respective spaces (particularly the high-touch surfaces) before starting their daily activities and at beginning and end of each workday.

## Planned Stages of Re-Entry



### **SAFER AT HOME:**

We will follow these baseline practices:

- ◆ All worship services and church activities will take place online
- ◆ If the pastors and staff choose to lead worship live from the sanctuary, the only people permitted in the sanctuary on Sunday morning will be Rev. Jenny, Rev. Scott, Chris Warrington, Max Nolin, and the minimum number of volunteers needed to manage technology or assist with worship. All other worship components will be done from home.

### **Building Operations in “Safer at Home”:**

- ◆ There should be no more than 10 people in the building at one time and all will maintain physical distancing measures.
- ◆ Bible studies, small groups, etc. will meet online.
- ◆ Service ministries will use safety protocols and only address essential needs.
- ◆ Minimal, drop-in staffing sufficient for essential operations (deposits, mail processing, etc.) will utilize the building



### **REOPENING: STAGE 1**

The pastors and church leaders will consider moving into Stage One using regional data (including a regional decline of COVID-19 cases), widespread availability of testing and contact tracing, adequate protective equipment (PPE), an abundance of cleaning supplies, and the cleaning protocols outlined above. Physical distancing measures, handwashing and masks will also continue in use.

We will follow these baseline practices:

- ◆ Sunday morning worship services live-streamed.
- ◆ Bible studies, meetings, and other small groups may meet online, but will also have an option to meet outside as defined below under “Small Group gatherings.”
- ◆ There will be no nursery service during Stage One.

### **Building Operations in Stage 1:**

- ◆ There should be no more than 10 people in the building at one time and all will maintain physical distancing measures.
- ◆ Limit office functions as much possible to ensure essential operations.
- ◆ Masks should be worn in the church building at all times.
- ◆ Surfaces, including the phone, are regularly sanitized if more than one person is present.

### **Small Group Gatherings in Stage 1:**

In Stage 1, we will introduce limited in-person gatherings (including church meetings) outdoors. We will begin with a maximum of 10 people per gathering, but after at least two weeks of successful implementation of Stage 1, we may consider larger groups up to the maximum number allowed by county regulations.

In Stage 1:

- ◆ Gatherings must be approved in advance.
- ◆ Gatherings are outdoors.
- ◆ No more than 25 people in attendance per gathering.
- ◆ Masks are required.
- ◆ No one should attend if feeling ill or presenting with COVID-19 symptoms.
- ◆ Maintain 6 feet distance.
- ◆ No singing
- ◆ Refrain from physical touch (i.e. shaking hands, etc.)
- ◆ People must sign up to attend.
- ◆ Allow sufficient space between scheduled activities that attendees will not be arriving/leaving at the same time.
- ◆ Attendees should not arrive more than 10 minutes early or leave later than 10 minutes after an activity ends.
- ◆ Families must sit together and will necessarily be less than six feet apart. Children may only attend if their caregivers agree to keep them with them at all times. Children must be able to wear a mask.
- ◆ Life rituals (weddings, funerals, baptisms) will be kept to fewer than 10 people and should also take place outside or off church premises.

### **Instructions for Small Group Gatherings:**

- ◆ Each small group shall have a designated point of contact who is identified to the church administrator and pastors, and who is responsible for ensuring that the processes outlined are followed.
- ◆ Pastors will have an online “tutorial” (or require small group attendees to view a short tutorial) with point of contact prior to attending the first small group gathering where they will review the above procedures. They will also:
  - + Review how to properly wear a mask.
  - + Emphasize the importance of not attending a gathering if sick.
  - + Provide a reminder to sneeze/cough into the elbow.

We will explore a variety of outdoor options for small group gatherings to include:

- ◆ Services in the parking lot (people stay in their cars).
- ◆ Standing in a circle or distanced.
- ◆ Parks with covered awnings.

If we become aware of someone in a small group gathering who becomes ill during the gathering or after the gathering has ended, we will enact our communication plan (see “What to Do if Someone Becomes Ill”).



## **REOPENING: STAGE 2**

In Stage 2, we may allow small group gatherings (of 10 people or less) inside the church building. We will have designated areas set aside where small groups can gather. There will be no nursery service during Stage 2.

There are two components of Stage 2, A & B. In Stage 2B worship services may be conducted in the sanctuary.

If we become aware of someone in a gathering who becomes ill during the gathering or after the gathering has ended, we will enact our communication plan (see “what to do if someone becomes ill”) and notify the Montgomery County Health Department and cooperate fully with contact tracers. See above comment about privacy concerns.

### **General Building Procedures during Stage Two:**

- ◆ Post signs at every entry point indicating COVID-19 symptoms, urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms, and stating our policies regarding masks and attendance numbers.
- ◆ Have hand sanitizer available at every entry point.
- ◆ Congregants should be encouraged not to use gloves while gathering for worship or small groups.
- ◆ Post signs on the floor indicating how congregants should “flow”, i.e. where they should move and settle while in the building.
- ◆ Maintain stocks of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels.
- ◆ Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
- ◆ Take appropriate steps to ensure that water and HVAC systems have been restarted to prevent Legionnaires disease.
- ◆ Investigation of the installment of affordable filters for BUMC that effectively remove circulating SARS-CoV-2 particles from the building as more evidence emerges about the airborne transmission of the novel coronavirus 2019.
- ◆ Encourage outdoor ventilation as much as possible when meeting in either small groups or in the sanctuary through the use of open doors or windows



## **REOPENING: STAGE 2A**

### **Small Group gatherings in Stage 2A:**

In Stage 2A, we will introduce indoor in-person gatherings (to include church meetings) but limit them to a maximum of 10 people per gathering. Children may only attend if their caregivers agree to be with them at all times and they are able to wear a mask and stay in place for 60 minutes.

In Stage Two (A), we will also allow for small groups to meet in the church as below:

- ◆ Groups must be approved in advance.
- ◆ Maintain online options for people who do not feel comfortable or have significant risk factors.
- ◆ No more than 10 people per gathering.
- ◆ Masks required.
- ◆ No one should attend if ill or presenting with COVID-19 symptoms.
- ◆ Maintain 6 feet physical distance.
- ◆ No singing except under particular conditions which will be outlined as part of a Musical Procedures Appendix to follow.
- ◆ Refrain from physical touch (i.e. shaking hands, etc.)
- ◆ Sign up to attend.
- ◆ Allow sufficient space between scheduled activities that attendees will not be arriving/leaving at the same time.
- ◆ Attendees should not arrive more than 10 minutes early or leave later than 10 minutes after an activity ends.
- ◆ Families must sit together. Children may only attend if their caregivers agree to keep them with them at all times and they are able to wear a mask and stay in place for 60 minutes.
- ◆ Someone in attendance from the group shall be designated as the point of contact with the pastors and staff and will keep the list of attendees and ensure that the high-touch surfaces are cleaned after the gathering.

### **Instructions for Small Group Gatherings:**

- ◆ The point of contact will be responsible for ensuring that the processes outlined are followed.
- ◆ Pastors will have an online “tutorial” (or require small group attendees view a short tutorial) with point of contact prior to attending the first small group gathering where they review the above procedures. They will also:
  - + Review how to properly wear a mask.
  - + Emphasize the importance of not attending a gathering if sick.

+ Remind to sneeze/cough into the elbow.

+ Remind not to attend if sick.



## **REOPENING: STAGE 2B**

### **Worship:**

Throughout Stage 2, we will continue to provide online worship and small groups.

We will also offer in-person worship during Stage 2B. Congregants will still observe physical distancing and withhold from physical touch. During worship, the following procedures shall

be observed:

- ◆ No one should attend if feeling sick.
- ◆ Open doors leading in/out of the sanctuary to obtain maximum ventilation.
- ◆ People must sign up to attend a particular service.
- ◆ Follow the Montgomery County or CDC guidance on determining the maximum number of people who can attend.
- ◆ People shall sit in a designated location, which corresponds to their sign-in sheet (this is to help with contact tracing if we learn that someone contracts COVID-19 after the service.)
- ◆ Families sit together. Children may only attend if their caregivers agree to keep them with them at all times and they are able to wear a mask and stay in place for 60 minutes.
- ◆ Clean-up crew to clean all high-touch surfaces between services.
- ◆ At least 1 hour between services in the event of multiple services.
- ◆ Masks required at all times while in the church building.
- ◆ Arrival no earlier 10 minutes before the service starts.
- ◆ Depart the church premises within 10 minutes after the service ends.

### **General Recommendations for Worship:**

As mentioned above, congregants should still observe physical distancing and withhold from physical touch.

During worship, the following procedures shall be observed:

- ◆ No congregational singing when we are gathered. It has been determined that 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.

- ◆ Use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Bibles and hymnals will be removed.
- ◆ No bulletins, we will use our overhead screens.
- ◆ Adapted version of coffee/fellowship hour inside during this stage (see below for an adapted version of fellowship/coffee hour during this stage.)
- ◆ Life rituals (weddings, funerals, confirmations) may take place in a more traditional way, with careful attention to guest lists so as to keep under the person limit, and physical distancing plans. Attendee limits will be based on the MD Government and CDC guidelines.
- ◆ Offering Communion safely will continue to be a challenge and safe procedures will need to be determined. Pastors may hold a general communion liturgy during the service in worship to consecrate pre-packed elements which congregants may take with them to take communion at home.

### **Fellowship/Coffee Hour**

In Stage 2, there will be an opportunity to have an “adapted” version of fellowship hour outside, weather permitting and to be decided by the pastors on the day of worship service. The number of attendees will need to be limited though we recognize that in-person community is a critical aspect to spiritual formation at BUMC and we will strive to incorporate social interaction safely. We shall observe follow the protocols as below:

- ◆ Maintain physical distancing with at least 6 feet
- ◆ Masks required.
- ◆ More than one table with food will be available for participants to access food from all sides
- ◆ Only individually packaged “takeaway” foods and drinks will be available. Eating or drinking on-site is discouraged.
- ◆ At least two trash cans available
- ◆ Someone shall be designated to clean the high-touch surfaces at the end of the gathering
- ◆ The fellowship/coffee hour shall end no later than 20 minutes prior to the beginning of the next worship service



## REOPENING: STAGE THREE

### Worship:

We will address Stage Three when adequate information is available.

#### Considerations may include:

- ◆ Continue offering online and in-person worship.
- ◆ Closely monitor public health recommendations on Communion as we get to this stage and consult our ecclesiastical authorities.
- ◆ Watch for public health recommendations on group singing as we arrive at this stage.
- ◆ Continue to use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources.
- ◆ Continue to use the overhead screens in place of Bibles, hymnals and bulletins.
- ◆ Small groups continue to meet in person in the building but follow cleaning protocols.
- ◆ Continue to offer some online small group options.
- ◆ Office functions could resume as normal, with attention to cleaning.