First United Methodist Church’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

RETURNING TO FACE-TO-FACE WORSHIP

RE-ENTRY PLAN

Adopted by the Church Council

Thursday, June 18, 2020

Introduction

This plan is based on recommendations from the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church, contained in the several documents constituting Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm, Do Good, Stay in Love with God (iaumc.org).

In addition to information and recommendations from the Conference, the Task Force has drawn on data from the Iowa Department of Health, particularly its Polk County data, and the expertise and experience of many of those within First Church’s own orbit, especially the standards and practices being used by the Creative Center for Young Children (CCYC), a fully licensed child care center and pre-school located within the First UMC building. In addition, the plan is the result of the thoughtful consideration of the Task Force members who have been able to bring their knowledge of the congregation and the facility to the discussion.

Status of the Congregation

At the time this Plan is being developed (mid-June, 2020), First UMC is in Level 3 status: The church is closed. There are no face-to-face worship services or meetings being held. Worship is live-streamed and posted to the Internet, with a minimum of worship leaders present. A limited number of meetings are being held, and those are conducted using Zoom audio/visual conferencing service.

This Plan addresses the process and practices that will be put in place when the congregation moves to Level 2 status: The church is re-opened on a limited basis, under very specific conditions, for those persons who are well and who are comfortable venturing back into a shared space. This status will continue for the foreseeable future.

At such time as the virus is contained and people are safe, we will move into Level 1 status: “Normal” functioning of worship, activities, and meetings. At present, there is no particular time frame identified for when that will happen.
Time Frame for Moving into Level 2

The Task Force looked at two sets of indicators in order to decide when to plan on moving into Level 2 and resuming worship under carefully controlled conditions:

1. The Conference recommendation to delay this move until the rate of new infections in an individual church’s county has declined for at least two weeks.
2. First UMC needs to have sufficient sanitizing products and equipment on hand, as well as personal masks and gloves before opening the building to the congregation.

DUE TO INCREASED INFECTION RATES IN POLK COUNTY, IN-PERSON WORSHIP HAS BEEN DELAYED.

How First UMC Will Function at Level 2

The Task Force has addressed several areas in anticipation of First UMC returning to worship.

Facilities Preparation and Sanitization

The building will be prepared and maintained in the following ways.

- A large sign will be placed at the entrance noting that anyone not feeling well or displaying any symptoms of the virus should return home without entering the building.
- The entrance sign will indicate that individuals should wait until the door is opened for them by an usher using the automatic opener.
- Signage will be placed at entrances, in restrooms, and at strategic locations throughout the portion of the facility that will be in use encouraging handwashing, distancing, avoiding physical contact with others, and additional specific practices designed to avoid spreading the virus, such as “one person at a time at restroom sinks.”
- The South Doors will be closed, and signs placed directing congregants to the North (parking lot) doors for entrance into the building.
- Six-foot spacing will be marked in walkways (signs, tape on floors, etc.)
- Every third pew will be available for seating. The two pews between the available ones will be roped off.
- Pews will contain space makings based on proper distancing between family groups.
- The East and West Balconies, the Libraries (adult’s on the main floor and children’s on the lower level), the Chapel, and meeting rooms will be closed.
- Hand sanitation stations will be located strategically throughout the portions of the building open to use.
- The Kenyon Hall Conference Room will be designated a “sick area.” Anyone who becomes acutely ill while in the building will be taken to this area until they can be transported to home or hospital. A wheelchair and other equipment (e.g., thermometer, masks, tissues, wipes, etc.) will be placed in this room. Ushers and
worship leaders will be trained in the use of this area. In the event this room is used, it will be closed off and adequately sanitized for continued use.

- In addition to regular cleaning throughout the building, high touch surfaces will receive enhanced cleaning following building use on Sundays. These surfaces include such things as tables, doorknobs, light switches, counter tops, toilets, faucets, handles, desks, phones, keyboards.
- Pastor Edgar and Lino will develop a checklist for cleaning and sanitizing before and after worship services, with special attention to those areas that need to be cleaned in anticipation of CCYC use beginning Monday mornings.
- An adequate supply of hand sanitizers, facial tissues, soap, paper towels, and disposable masks, disinfectant, and cleaning supplies will be maintained.

**Flow and Crowd Control**

The Ushers will be responsible for directing the flow and augmenting the information provided by signage. Following are the steps that congregants can expect when they enter the building, participate in worship, and leave the building.

- Ushers will serve as both ushers and greeters.
- People will only enter through the North (parking lot) entrance of the church.
- An usher will open the doors using the handicap button. The congregant should not touch the door.
- Each individual will have his/her temperature taken by an usher using a touchless thermometer before they proceed.
- Two tables will be located in the entry way. These tables will have hand sanitizer to be dispensed by an usher, and masks for those entering. Ushers/greeters will wear gloves. Preferably, congregants will provide their own masks but masks will be available for visitors and those who forget theirs. Hand sanitizer and mask usage will be monitored by ushers.
- Entry into the building and Kenyon Hall will be monitored and paced to avoid having family groupings too close to each other.
- Additional hand sanitizer will also be located in the narthex.
- Only middle doors of the narthex will be used to enter the sanctuary. Ushers will guide parishioners to suitable pews. Family units will be able to sit together. Others must be socially distanced.
- There will be no movement of people during a time of greeting. Congregants may turn and wave, smile, etc. but no handshaking or hugging.
- Ushers will dismiss parishioners at the end of the service by rows (as with funerals and weddings)
- Ushers will be stationed in Kenyon Hall to ensure that people continue out the building without lingering.
What to Expect during Worship

In addition to the physical changes in the way congregants move through the building and arrange themselves in the sanctuary, the worship experience itself will be different.

- Because singing spreads virus-laden droplets farther and faster than ordinary talking, there will be no congregational singing while we continue Level 2 precautions.
- Summer Bells and guest musicians will provide special music during the Summer.
- Beginning with the first Sunday in September, the Chancel Choir will return, but will NOT be singing. Rather, they will be providing musical enhancement in a variety of ways, such as reading hymn texts along with instrumental music, leading the congregation in sign language responses, using clapping and rhythmic movement to enhance the musical experience.
- The White Chapel Chimes will provide music on the last Sunday of the month. Chimes’ tables will be set up across the front of the chancel area to accommodate distancing.
- The Chamber Singers will provide choral music on Sundays. They will sing from a suitably distanced arrangement in the east and west balconies.
- There will be baskets available for depositing offering and offering envelopes. There will be no collection plates passed.
- The “Square” card-based giving station will not be available while we remain in Level 2 conditions. Electronic giving is available on the church’s web site.
- Communion will be conducted using individual, sealed, pre-packaged packets.
- Worship leaders will remove their masks when speaking from the pulpit and lectern.
- Worship will continue to be recorded and will be posted to You Tube and Facebook for viewing later. There will be no life streaming of worship.
- The first observation of Holy Community will be the first Sunday in August.
- Even though the east and west balconies will be closed to congregants, the Chamber singers will be singing from those balconies.

Sunday School, Children’s Ministry and Fellowship Time

- There will be NO Sunday School (all age groups), Children’s Church, or Nursery while we remain in Level 2 status.
- Children will remain with their families at all times when they are in the building.
- There will be no after-worship Fellowship Time. Following worship, at the direction of the ushers, congregants need to proceed from the sanctuary, through Kenyon Hall, and out of the building without undue lingering.
• Laurie Hoskins has been preparing and distributing Children’s Church kits to families, and will continue to do so throughout the summer.

Communications

• Every member household will receive a hard-copy letter describing
  o When we will resume face-to-face worship
  o How to prepare for coming back to church for worship
  o What to expect of the worship experience.
• The above information will also be shared regularly in The Light and “Cross Notes,” and on the First UMC website.
• The District Superintendent will be notified of our anticipated date of returning to face-to-face worship.
• A variety of signs will be made and posted throughout the building. Some of these will be provided by the Centers for Disease Control. Some will be custom made by the First UMC staff reflecting best practices, but with a “Biblical” or lighthearted theme (e.g., “Love one another...6 feet apart,” or “Spread the Gospel, not germs. Wear a mask.”) Others will be very specific to the First UMC situation, such as the South side sign directing worshippers to the North entrance.
• A second letter will go to each member household at such time as we move into Level 1 status, effectively removing restrictions from building usage and worship practices.

Miscellaneous Items

• Sanitizing equipment and supplies (sanitizers, dispensers, masks, gloves, thermometers) are on order and should be on hand for our projected “first Sunday back – July 5.”
• Worship leaders, Ushers, and musicians will hold a “rehearsal” for traffic flow and worship practices prior to July 5.
• Meal preparation for Connection Café has been suspended until we move into Level 1. Monetary support is being provided in lieu of the actual meal.
• Meal preparation continues monthly in the main kitchen for the Central Iowa Shelter and Services and Supper Club meals.
• Foxhall AA is currently meeting virtually and in very small groups. They have asked when they can return to their weekly use of Fellowship Hall. We will share our Re-Entry Plan with Foxhall AA and invite them to make a proposal to the Church Council describing how they would conduct their gatherings using precautions consistent with those described in our Plan.

The Mabaan Congregation

The Mabaan congregation has not yet decided when it will return to worship. It will not be before July 5, but it could be later. Beyond suspending Sunday School and determining that
children will remain with their worshipping family, Pastor Aaron Limmo and the Mabaan congregation continue to discuss their community’s needs and how to manage the nature of their worship under these conditions.

Moving to **Level 1**

According to the Conference, moving to Level 1 means the re-opening of all churches and a return to regular worship practice, normal scheduling and regular business hours. The FUMC Task Force has not discussed possible timing for this step. However, it is unlikely to be in the very near future, and will no doubt be heavily influenced by Conference recommendations.

Guidance from the Conference uses the following language regarding moving to Level 1:

- COVID-19 is contained and people are safe.
- Church leadership is confident in the care of their community of faith.
- Activities will likely be guided by testing protocol for asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers, antibody testing, therapeutic drug therapies aggressively caring for those who have contracted COVID-19, and approval and availability of a COVID-19 vaccine.

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