

COVID-19 Precautions Update (11/19/20)

See also, *COVID & The Church: Frequently Asked Questions*



As much as we have all hoped for a break from COVID-19, the case rates and viral reproduction rates in Minnesota, and Wright County, have been out of control and increasing exponentially. Because we have already been observing very stringent contact precautions, much has remained the same in this update. Recent changes are underlined in green.

Phased Regathering Plan. The basic rules of thumb that Bishop Ough has asked all Minnesota United Methodists to follow (John Wesley actually asked these of us first) are to: 1) Do no harm; 2) Do all the good we can; and 3) Stay in love with God. It's the desire to avoid doing harm to those most vulnerable in our community that is the primary motive behind our Phased Regathering Plan for Churches (<https://www.minnesotaumc.org/regatheringplan>). If you haven't yet had a chance to read the Bishop's plan, please do so, as well as the Bishop's most recent letter. The Bishop has dialed us back to the "Red" phase of our regathering plan, the phase of the plan with the most precautions. Here's what that means in practical terms:

Everyone should wear a mask, frequently wash hands, and observe at least six feet of physical distance when sharing the church building and church grounds with others. Using hand sanitizer is an alternative when handwashing is not practical. Nobody should come to the church building or church grounds if they have a fever or other symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

Groups of any size are strongly discouraged from meeting inside the church building during this phase.

Church Staff continue to work remotely whenever possible and deliberately stagger

building use with other staff. Church office hours are by appointment and the church telephone continues to be answered during business hours. Staff remain available electronically and by telephone.

Church Ministry Groups are asked to continue to meet electronically, or to meet outdoors while wearing masks and observing safe physical distances of at least six feet. *If there is a compelling reason that it is necessary to meet in-person and indoors, then the standard precautions should be followed (see next item), but most church ministry groups can best avoid doing harm by continuing to meet with a lower risk, either electronically or outside.* Groups of any size are strongly discouraged from meeting inside the church building.

Children's and Youth Ministries. Per the Regathering Plan, all children's and youth ministries such as Sunday School, Confirmation, and Youth Group will meet online until further notice.

Outside Groups. Outside groups of any size are prohibited from meeting inside the church building during this phase.

Funerals and Burials. Pastor Bill may conduct outdoor graveside memorial/interment services with attendances limited to 10 or fewer people, provided masks are worn and it is possible to maintain a distance of at least six feet between groups that are currently living together. These are not full funerals, but are intended to help grieving families and friends say goodbye to loved ones.

Baptisms. Baptisms are being deferred until further notice. Outdoor, distanced baptisms will resume when either the outside weather improves or the pandemic eases.

Membership. Virtually nothing we do as the Body of Christ requires church membership, and we have always encouraged people to begin living into what it means to be a part of our church before joining. Membership is, however, a meaningful covenant involving the gathered community, and we look forward to receiving new members again once we have resumed in-person worship and determine a safe and meaningful way to celebrate that covenant.

Outside Gatherings. Gathering together outside is significantly safer when the Minnesota weather permits it! Masks and physical distance should still be observed. Meeting outside is a viable option for many church ministry groups while the weather remains hospitable. *However, please note that we are asking that Children's and Youth gatherings remain online for now.*

In-Person, Sanctuary Worship. This type of gathering is the most challenging in terms of maintaining a safe environment, largely because of the factors of poor air flow, larger numbers, confined space, and extended exposure duration. Nevertheless, there WILL come a time when we are ready to resume in-person sanctuary worship. The first step toward will be watch parties, where physically distant groups will meet indoors, with masks, to watch online worship broadcasts on Sunday morning. Meanwhile, the church is [preparing to order](#) AV technology which will allow us to continue online broadcasts even after we have transitioned into more regular indoor worship.

Summary. This continues to be a challenging time for everyone. Although the church has never really closed, I do understand the pressing desire felt by some to return to our church sanctuary, as well as the stark reality faced by a significant percentage of our congregation that are at an elevated risk for serious COVID-19 complications. We will continue to monitor the guidance given to us by the Minnesota Annual Conference, as well as State and Wright County epidemiological data such as 14-day caseload per 10,000. Meanwhile, please patiently endure the uncertainty that we all must face in these days for a while longer. I'm so encouraged by the large number of you who have been creative and flexible in adapting to the new ways we are adopting to be in ministry these days. Have a good idea for trying something new? The staff,

Leadership Team, and I would love to hear from you.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Bill

BUFFALO
UNITED METHODIST