

Covenant United Methodist Church, Montgomery Village, MD

Covenant (CUMC) Small Group Guidelines and COVID-19 Impact

July 7, 2020

Small groups have an important role in our faith community with spiritual development and administrative support of our church. COVID-19 has impacted having in-person meetings and these guidelines are a response to small group meetings based on the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United Methodist Baltimore Washington Conference, Maryland State and Montgomery County, Maryland. These small group guidelines are in conjunction with other CUMC COVID-19 guidelines.

The recommended level for small group meetings is first virtual, then outside (due to increased ventilation and decreased cleaning), then inside the church building. The Fellowship Hall must be used since it is a larger space, has metal chairs and is not carpeted (which minimizes cleaning) and a single meeting area limits the amount of exposure and associated cleaning. There are three restrooms (including one that is “accessible”) that are the closest to Fellowship Hall.

Pre-Meeting

1. The small group leader should contact the CUMC Office to confirm the date, time, location and estimated number of participants.
2. There should be one congregant/family unit per 200 sq. ft. of indoor or outdoor space (per Montgomery County guidelines in effect June 26, 2020). The Fellowship Hall is approximately 40 by 47 feet with a maximum of nine participants.
3. The small group leader must confirm that there will be an adequate number of masks for anyone who does not arrive wearing their own and hand sanitizer which is 60% or higher in alcohol content.
4. The small group leader must be provided training to reflect updated CDC guidelines for Community and Faith-Based Organizations.
5. The small group leader must advise participants to stay home if not well and having symptoms including fever or chills, cough, or shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
6. The small group leader must notify the participants that their names and contact information will be kept in case contact tracing is needed.
7. Any additional groups that request a meeting using CUMC resources (including grounds, buildings or software support like Zoom) must be approved by the CUMC pastor.

Meeting

1. A participant must wear a cloth face covering unless eating or he/she are under the age of 2 or has trouble breathing, is unconscious, is incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. (Face coverings can be removed for outdoor meetings/worship once folks are seated and in place.)
2. Entrance and exit from the church building or outside meeting location should be designated and be in one direction. There should be markings and signage to guide participants. Participants must proceed immediately to the meeting room and not linger in hallways or entryway.

3. Participants should bring their own chairs if meeting outside. Chairs and tables should be placed so that one person/family unit are greater than six feet apart.
4. Face coverings, hand sanitizer and no touch trash cans should be available.
5. Participants must bring their own materials including hymnals, books and writing supplies.
6. In-person singing must not be done.
7. Amplification must be used if anyone needs a higher volume to be heard.
8. If food is offered because it is necessary to the meeting, it must be pre-packaged.
9. Leader should ask participants to consider these screening questions before they arrive:
 - Do you feel sick (fever, coughing or shortness of breath) or are you living with someone who feels sick?
 - Have you tested positive for COVID-19 or live with someone who has tested positive in the last 14 days?
 If the answer to either question is yes, then participants will be asked to refrain from in-person meetings.
10. Where possible, group leaders should offer a virtual connection to participants that are not able to attend or who choose not to attend. This could be a recorded video, an e-mail follow-up, a live Zoom, or a phone call.
11. Only one person must use each restroom at a time. Outside the restroom, CUMC will have floor markings that are greater than six feet apart.
12. If anyone becomes sick with COVID-19 symptoms (including fever, cough, muscle aches) during the meeting, they should be in a separate area and sent to their home or a healthcare facility. Do not use this separate area until after cleaning and disinfection. The CUMC pastor must be notified that day.

Post Meeting

1. Any objects that have been touched should be cleaned and disinfected with CDC/EPA approved disinfectants. including tables, chairs, bathrooms, door handles and audiovisual equipment.
2. Names and contact information of participants should be kept with date of meeting in case contact tracing needs to be done.

Resources

1. Re-Entering Well Guidelines. Baltimore Washington Conference.
https://b65de766771c0b853a36-be165dca3b4cdda77f8dc2ad6b17900c.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/b/0e10380576_1588949059_bwc-re-entry-overview-final-final.pdf. Accessed June 25, 2020.
2. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19, Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). May 23, 2020.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>. Accessed June 25, 2020.
3. Reopening Montgomery. Montgomery County, Maryland.
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/reopening/>. Accessed June 25, 2020.
4. Maryland Resources for Community and Faith-Based Organizations.
<https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/community-resources>. Accessed June 25, 2020.

