

Covenant United Methodist Church
20301 Pleasant Ridge Drive
Montgomery Village, Maryland 20886

Inside Worship Planning Document
(Revised October 14, 2020)

Covenant United Methodist Church is committed to following credible government and denominational guidance and best practices. As more information about Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become available, CUMC is modifying its activities to balance the values of safety for all and faithfulness in discipleship. We are mindful that high risk individuals may choose to minimize their exposure risk by limiting activities such as worship gatherings. For the foreseeable future, virtual worship will continue to be offered.

Coronavirus safety precautions: Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Maryland, Montgomery County and United Methodist Baltimore-Washington Conference guidelines to be followed: social distancing to be maintained (*i.e.*, a minimum of six feet of separation), masks to be worn during service, no physical contact, no bulletins or distributed materials, no singing, high contact surfaces to be cleaned between each service, appropriate staff training.

Time: Sundays at 10:00 am. Weekly, beginning November 1, 2020.

Location: The worship service will be in the sanctuary with overflow in the Fellowship Hall.

Service: Inside worship will be a combination of live elements and playback of prerecorded elements. Call to worship, scripture reading(s), sermon and benediction to be provided live. Choir hymns will be prerecorded. The pastor and lector should stand at least 12 feet from the first row of congregants and should wear masks when not speaking.

A collection plate will be placed at the back of the sanctuary and will not be passed. Counters for the offering should use disposable gloves.

Communion, if provided, will be distributed with individual prepackaged elements. Communion is planned on the first Sunday of each month.

After the service, congregants will exit by rows at the direction of an usher instead of all at once, in order to promote the required six feet of social distancing. Congregants will be asked to exit directly to the courtyard, rather than gathering in the vestibule or hallways.

Masks:

Congregants will be asked to wear masks while they are in the sanctuary except when receiving communion. CUMC will have disposable masks available if attendees do not bring their own.

Masks should not be placed on children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

Music: Hymns to be prerecorded and played back during the service. The prelude and postlude may also be prerecorded. No congregational singing.

Children's Ministry: No Sunday school. Children must stay with parents.

Attendance: Currently, the maximum capacity will be 48 persons. Per Montgomery County Executive Order 114-20 (effective Sept. 22, 2020), maximum capacity for religious gatherings is determined by dividing the total square footage of the worship space by 50, however total number of individuals shall not exceed 40% of permitted occupancy. For the sanctuary, there is a permitted occupancy of 280 people (yielding a potential capacity of 112 people). However, the square footage calculation yields a lower number, 48 people (approximately 2400 sq. ft./50). Thus, the maximum permitted for an indoor service at this time is 48 persons, including the pastor, lector and others participating in the service.

CUMC will have advance reservations for at least the first service, in order to gauge interest. Walk-up attendance and guests are permitted but must be identified. Ushers will take attendance with phone number or email for contact tracing.

Screening:

Prior to the first service of each day, faith leaders, volunteers and other staff must be screened (verbally, in writing, or online) using the following questions:

1. Are you suffering from any of the common symptoms of COVID-19 (coughing, difficulty breathing, loss of taste, etc.)?
2. Have you had close personal contact with anybody known to have a positive COVID-19 diagnosis over the past two weeks?

If either response is yes, then the recommendation should be the virtual worship service.

Congregants should be screened using the same questions which could be verbally, in writing or online (when registering) and if either response is yes, then the recommendation should be the virtual worship service.

Anyone who exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should be advised of the virtual worship service until at least 72 hours after their symptoms have resolved.

Upon entering the sanctuary, congregants will be screened using a contactless thermometer. Anyone showing a fever will be asked to attend virtual service instead.

Montgomery County Disease Control at 240-777-1755 should be contacted if a person who participated in a religious ceremony is diagnosed with or develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

Facilities: The lector and pastor will have separate microphones.

Congregants will be seated at alternating ends of each row in order to maximize distance between each person/group. This will ensure that congregants have at least one vacant row before the next person/group on their end of the row and that individuals are properly distanced in the sanctuary. Children over two and adults will be asked to maintain masking while in the sanctuary. Individuals that are not a part of the same household must maintain 6 feet of social distance from the point of entry into the facility through their exit from the facility. Exceptions include where the core activity or safety require shorter distance (including pallbearers).

Written material in the sanctuary including Bibles, hymnals and attendance pads will be put away in storage.

Signs should be posted that promote everyday protective measures including how to properly wash hands. CUMC will provide appropriate hand sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol.

Restrooms by the hallway by Fellowship Hall will open for congregants. Only one person at a time may use each available restroom. Congregants will be asked to wait at least six feet apart. Restrooms will be equipped with appropriate hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes for each use.

All restrooms and high contact surfaces to be cleaned with CDC and EPA approved disinfectants between each service.

Implementation assistance: Altar guild, ushers, acolytes and CUMC hospitality team needed.

Video: The video screen in the sanctuary will be provided. Worship services will also be available virtually (unless real time streaming is provided).

Fellowship Hour: Initially, CUMC does not expect to provide Fellowship Hour after

services. When a fellowship time is permitted, the maximum capacity in the Fellowship Hall per Executive Order 114-20 is 36 people (which is based on 1800 sq ft and a permitted occupancy of 180). If food and drinks are provided, they must be prepackaged. There should be social distancing of at least 6 feet for individuals that are not part of the same household. Appropriate face coverings should be worn unless eating or drinking.

Parking: CUMC parking lots and street parking as overflow will be available. Congregants will be encouraged to leave adequate space between the next parked car, but no spaces will be blocked off.

Resources:

1. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19, Considerations for Communities of Faith. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). May 23, 2020. Accessed: September 26, 2020.
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fphp%2Ffaith-based.html
2. Maryland Strong Roadmap to Recovery. Effective: September 4, 2020. Accessed: September 26, 2020.
<https://governor.maryland.gov/2020/09/01/governor-hogan-announces-beginning-of-stage-three-of-marylands-covid-19-recovery-additional-safe-and-gradual-reopenings/>
3. Montgomery County Executive Order No. 114-20. COVID-19 – Local Order Amending and Restating Order dated August 24, 2020. Effective Date: 9/22/2020. Accessed: 9/24/2020.
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/orders/114-20.pdf>
4. Re-Entering Well Guidelines. Baltimore Washington Conference September 3, 2020. Accessed: September 26, 2020.
<https://www.bwcumc.org/article/re-entering-well/>