

CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH BUILDING RE-OPENING POLICY

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18). This is a time for love put into wise action for ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our community, and our church. In these circumstances, we seek to be guided by God. This means that we must seek out biblical wisdom through the Scriptures to guide our actions. We should also use other means of knowing that God has given us—like science—to guide our COVID-19 reopening plans.

Ultimately, reopening the church building for worship and ministry is a balance between safety and risk assessment. As a church body we wish to err on the side of safety for our vulnerable church members and potential visitors from the community. Using both Scripture and the best available science to guide our actions improves the likelihood that we will effectively love our neighbors.

Scientifically-Based Mitigation Approaches: We also need to use scientific knowledge about this virus to prevent its spread in our churches. The church is a high-risk setting for COVID-19 transmission. There are examples where this has led to painful and cascading consequences for our churches and communities. Some people in our churches are at greater risk for serious complications from COVID-19, especially the elderly, those with chronic conditions, and even children. Therefore, churches should carefully consider when and how to resume in-person ministries and have a clear plan to do so.

Review COVID-19 Scientific Findings and Seek Safe Actions Research has shown church activities contain multiple factors that facilitate airborne COVID-19 spread. Below (see table) is a summary of what is known about how COVID-19 is transmitted, followed by suggested safety actions based on the best scientific data available. We are following the information listed below for guidance to identify possible risks in our church.

What We Know About COVID-19 There is a rapidly expanding body of scientific knowledge about COVID-19. Experts agree that COVID-19 will be in the US for the foreseeable future, with fluctuating levels of infection in the community. Until a vaccine is available, the virus (SARS-CoV-2) and the disease will be a threat to our public health. Some of these recent insights are particularly relevant to churches as they consider how to resume in-person ministries:

- COVID-19 can be transmitted before a person develops symptoms. This explains why the virus spreads so easily and stealthily, greatly complicating efforts to contain its spread.
- Not every infected person will infect another person; factors that impact transmission include: infectiousness of the COVID-19 carrier, actions that increase the release of respiratory droplets and aerosols into the surrounding air, proximity to an infected person (within six feet is considered high risk), time spent in an enclosed environment with limited ventilation to the outside, amount of time spent with an infected person, and type of social network (e.g., intergenerational). In settings where a greater number of these factors are present, the risk of transmission will be higher.
- Because older people are more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 and children are less likely to display symptoms, intergenerational contact should be minimized to reduce COVID-19 transmission. It is important to note that children who have been infected have developed complications from COVID-19, so we must remain diligent to reduce exposure to children as well.
- Younger adults with common chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and autoimmune disease also have an increased risk of serious complications. In fact, nearly 60 percent of COVID-19 hospital admissions in the US are for those under 65 years old.
- Several states have started to lift stay-at-home orders, even though their COVID-19 case counts remain high or have just started to decline. This will lead to an increase in transmission and new cases as individuals begin to resume activities which could increase their exposure. This increase can be mitigated by extensive testing, effective contact tracing, and quarantining of contacts. But no state yet has the testing capacity and the trained personnel to carry out effective tracing and quarantining.
- COVID-19 can spread from one state to another. As long as one part of the country has a poorly controlled epidemic, states that have significantly reduced their cases will remain vulnerable to COVID-19 spread from those areas. The same can be said of spread from one country to another.

Phase One – All church meetings, worship, and ministry will be conducted at a distance or online, ie Facebook Live, Email, Zoom video conference

Begun on March 13th, 2020

Phase Two – Minimal office staff may return to work from the office with proper social distancing and masks worn when not alone in the office. Worship will be livestreamed from the church sanctuary on Sunday mornings by the pastor and his immediate family.

Begun May 11th, 2020

Phase Three – We will begin to reopen the building for worship and ministry with the following guidelines beginning July 1st, 2020:

No gathering in the church building may exceed 50 people or 25% of the room capacity at any time until these restrictions are lifted by the Governor of NJ.

Live streamed worship service will continue for the foreseeable future. Church members who are showing symptoms of infection (cough, fever, etc) are asked to remain at home and enjoy worship on Facebook Live.

Also, church members who fall into at risk categories are encouraged to remain at home and enjoy worship on Facebook Live.

Arriving to the Church

Policy and practice guidelines will be provided to every member prior to returning to the building for worship or ministry. This will be accomplished by email or postal mail as soon as policies are approved by church council.

Policies and practices will also apply to any group using the church facility for meetings, weddings, or funerals.

Wearing of masks is suggested indoors. If you arrive at church without a mask, we will do all we can to provide masks if you need one.

All persons entering the church for worship or ministry gatherings will be asked to sanitize their hands upon entering and to refrain from touching surfaces as much as possible.

When the weather allows, doors will be propped open to minimize contact with door handles and high touch surfaces. If weather does not allow, an usher will be posted at the door to ease access as people enter the building.

Worship Experience

Bulletins will not be provided at the current time. The order of worship will be projected on the overhead screen.

All persons are required to maintain a social distance of six feet from others with whom they do not share a household as much as possible. At the conclusion of worship service, an usher will direct the congregation to exit from the back of the sanctuary first. Social distancing must be maintained during dismissal.

Because research has demonstrated that singing expels more vapor and potentially spreads covid-19 further, music will be limited to instrumental and pre-recorded songs.

The offering plate will not be passed through the congregation. Until further notice, the offering plate will be placed next to the door at the exit of the sanctuary. Please leave your offering in the plate on your way out of worship, or continue to give online.

Until further notice, communion will not be offered from a common loaf. Individual communion serving cups will be provided.

Communal items like hymnals, pew Bibles, and log books have been removed from the pews. The order of worship will be projected on the overhead screen.

Children will remain with their families during wiggle time.

Nursery and Sunday School

Children in worship must remain with their families throughout the service.

Nursery will be available for parents as an option. Nursery care providers must wear a mask.

Sunday School will resume in-person using a one-room-Sunday School format. Children will be invited to the Sunday School room by family groups and asked to remain in family groups during class.

Fellowship Activities

There will be no fellowship, food or coffee hours at this time.

Meetings

Meetings will continue online and by conference call as needed but may be held in person with proper social distancing.

Office Practices

Office hours will continue to be 10am to 1pm Monday through Friday.

People are encouraged to deal with any issues by calling the office or by email to info@centralmethodistchurch.org. If you need to visit the office in-person we ask that you wear a mask in the building and keep your visit to a minimum amount of time.

Regular Cleaning

The church is regularly cleaned by a service. We will also regularly clean and sanitize the Sanctuary and the bathrooms.

Phase Four – Looking toward the future, we will lift restrictions in a gradual manner as restrictions are lifted statewide and nationwide. Regular discussion and meetings will be required to relax restrictions and policies.