

CALVARY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH RE-OPENING GUIDELINES

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We give thanks to God every day for the caring, courageous, adaptive ministry of the People Called Methodist around New England over these months of illness and isolation.

We celebrate the way the church continues to live and breathe...because we are connected through Christ.

We grieve with many who have lost so much; and, we give thanks for the many ways we have been able to prevent further suffering and minister to those who are enduring significant hardship.

We are in this together...because we are connected through Christ.

We recognize that our ecumenical partners, independent churches, and faith communities may make decisions different from ours. Some in our local communities have begun to reopen their doors more quickly have.

We recognize that when we do begin to return to our churches and camps and places of worship, it will not be the same as it was before COVID-19. Our return will not be the great gathering of all the people many of us have dreamed of and hoped for. Returning to offices and church buildings will be gradual, in phases, and not advisable for those in highest risk groups for some time.

And, we recognize that we may have to take steps back if the virus resurges in the future.

CURRENT STATE: AS OF AUGUST 2020, CALVARY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IS NOT HOLDING IN-PERSON WORSHIP, MEETINGS, OR GATHERINGS.

Calvary is providing worship opportunities via an assortment of platforms, including online or televised worship, conference calls, DVD worship, et cetera. Pastors, staff, and key volunteers are creating these worship experiences while maintaining current guidelines of physical distancing and meeting in groups of less than ten people.

Discontinuing in-person worship, meetings, and gatherings has helped us love our neighbor well by keeping everyone safe.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING RIGHT NOW?

In-Person Worship

- No in-person worship. Churches should hold virtual worship services only. Worship teams should record from home, not the church buildings.

Preschools, Children & Youth

- Consider creative online VBS and youth activity options to keep children and youth engaged, making sure to honor the On-Line Safety section of the [Safe Sanctuaries](#) internet safety.

Missions & Outreach

- No mission trips, including youth trips, are recommended (this applies through the summer at least).
- All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.

Church Staff

- Work remotely.
- Minimal drop-in staffing for essential operations only (collecting mail, processing payments, etc.) using the guidelines for size of

gathering, physical distancing, wearing masks, gloves, et cetera. Their presence onsite should be done with minimal overlap.

Groups

- Meetings, Bible studies, et cetera should be held remotely.

Recommendations around each of these areas will be regularly updated and revised. If you have additional questions about specific areas of ministry, please consult your District Superintendent.

PREPARATION

Returning to in-person worship will require a **phased-in approach**. To promote the safest practices, it is recommended that **CDC guidelines, local and state guidelines, and denominational guidelines** all be considered when making decision about when to launch phases.

PHASE GOALS:

- **Create confidence** for the staff as plans are made for the congregation and community to return to our building/s.
- **Identify challenges** that would hinder bringing people back to our building/s safely.
- **Get comfortable** with the “new normal.”

Preparation Phase: Staff, Volunteers & Space

CHECKLIST: Preparing Staff & Volunteers

- Ensure facility has adequate amounts of masks and gloves for staff and volunteers (particularly greeters and cleaners).
- Plan an online session to review hygiene, cleaning/disinfecting practices that will be expected upon return.
- Develop plans for changing worship logistics to ensure safety of attendees (e.g., offering, communion). *More ideas in the next section.*
- Develop protocol for ushers and greeters that would allow for physical distancing. You may consider new roles for volunteers in high-risk categories. *More ideas in the next section.*
- Create a trial phase to document and practice communications, processes, and procedures that will ensure safety when in-person worship is initiated, learning what is and is not effective.
- Publish your local guidelines for anyone on church property. Monitor understanding and adherence to guidelines among staff. Identify any needed guideline or process remediation.

CHECKLIST: Preparing Your Space

- Ensure 3-month supply of cleaning/sanitizing products. Have a system in place to reorder items before they are depleted.
- Eliminate places to congregate (e.g., store chairs; eliminate coffee stations).

- Thoroughly sanitize all surfaces, especially those in high-traffic areas. After each event, disinfect all surfaces, being over diligent about what you think may have been touched.
 - Note: If it has been more than 7 days since a person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 has visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary. This guidance also applies when reopening a building that has been closed to everyone for a full week or longer.
- Develop congregational seating plan for physical distancing. Ensure at least a 6-foot distance.
- Develop protocol for sanitizing to take place before and after service and in real-time during worship.
- Walk through each step of in-person worship multiple times. Follow signage, communications, and directions that will be provided to worshipers. Refine as needed.

LOOKING AHEAD

Worship is an essential service for our members. The safety of our communities should not be compromised. Guidelines provided by state and local governments are a baseline, and recommendations for worship may be more restrictive in the interest of safety. Church officials must be aware of the local situation and should tailor their path through the phases of these guidelines to ensure that they are appropriate to the local situation. **When in doubt, emphasize safety over expedience.**

When first returning to in-person worship, continue to consider yourself an online congregation, as not all members will choose to be in our building/s at first, or at all. Consider a “soft opening” relaunch with limited-capacity, in-person meetings that do not exceed the maximum number of individuals recommended by state and local governments. Continue to engage online worshipers even after going to an in-person worship experience.

INITIAL RETURN TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP

CHECKLIST:

What do we need before going back to in-person worship?

- Church and staff are in compliance with state/local orders regarding distancing, gathering, and sanitation (including the ability to sanitize common areas before, during, and after worship).
- The church is properly staffed with the trained volunteers/lay people necessary to regulate and enforce state/local orders regarding distancing, gathering, and sanitation (including seating, mask wearing, bathroom occupancy, opening/closing doors, parking).
- The church can provide reasonable accommodation to allow for comfortable worship while still complying to physical distancing requirements (for example: clearly marked areas, large spaces for families, special seating for high-risk individuals, etc.).
- The church has a clear, proactive communication strategy to ensure congregants are aware of current practices and safety/wellness protocols (e.g., e-mail, website, social media, signage at the church).
- The church has a dedicated team that reviews the church's compliance to state/local protocols and agrees upon any necessary exceptions.

Who should attend in-person worship services?

Congregants meeting the following criteria are recommended to attend in-person worship:

- People who are well (no recent contact with infected persons, not exhibiting flu-like symptoms)
- Clergy, worship team (technical and performing), ushers/lay leaders (if well and not in a high-risk group)
- People who cannot attend online
- People who feel it is the right time for their family.

IDEAS FOR SAFE IN-PERSON WORSHIP

The following are not to be seen as requirements, but rather ideas to help churches manage worship logistics in their phased relaunch of in-person worship.

NOTE: Consider continuing remote-only church until guidelines can be relaxed to where a comfortable, safe worship environment is achievable. These guidelines will be reviewed and revised based on updated information. As we move through launch phases, new guidelines will be communicated.

Attendance Register

Goal: Prevent sharing germs via physical objects passed from person to person.

- Create online attendance register.
- Have individual cards available as people enter for those who do not want to fill out online register.

You will need a method to record attendees' contact info to facilitate required contact tracing.

A/V Equipment

Goal: Prevent germ sharing and spreading germs that stay on surfaces

- Sanitize before and after each service.
- No sharing of hearing enhancement equipment.
- Identify microphones to be used by single individuals, no shared microphones, music stands, et cetera.

Baptisms/Ceremonies

Goal: Honor traditions while keeping everyone safe

- Consider how your church will address special events: baptisms, weddings, funerals, Vacation Bible School: What events should be cancelled and what other events can be postponed or “retooled” in a different format (consider livestreaming or recording if possible to share with congregation)?
- Follow state/local guidelines for attendance numbers and other considerations.
- Limit baptisms to one person per bowl of water in the sanctuary.

Communion

Goal: Prevent spread of germs through food, passed elements, et cetera

- Use individual, pre-packaged elements handed out as people enter or placed on seats in advance.
- Use individual, disposable cups passed out by individual who has sanitized hands, is wearing gloves.
- Offer a blessing/prayer for those who do not choose to receive communion during this time. Have trash receptacles nearby.

Entry & Exit

Goal: Control pathways, prevent traffic jams, ensure everyone entering worship space has used precautions

- Prop doors open to avoid touching doorknobs, or have one person hold door open (wearing a mask).
- Single entry point, clearly marked exits with hand sanitizer at each.
- Guide family groups to exit the worship area/building 10 feet apart and encourage them not to linger.

Food & Beverage

Goal: Prevent germ sharing and germs that stay on surfaces for longer

- Discontinue all food and beverage in building/s until further notice.

Interpersonal Space

Goal: Prevent airborne droplets of potential germs

- Shorten services to allow for more time to enter/exit the premises.
- Be aware of physical distancing.
- Discontinue any hand holding, passing of the peace, hand shaking, et cetera. Instead, encourage another way to greet each other at a distance (smile, wave, etc.).

Masks

Goal: Prevent airborne droplets of potential germs

- All participants over age 2 required to wear masks (have a supply available for persons who arrive without).
- Consider whether children will understand and comply with requirements before inviting them into worship.
- Speakers/preachers/soloist may remove masks while speaking/sharing **IF** they are a minimum of 16 feet from the nearest person.

Offering

Goal: Prevent sharing germs via physical items passed from person to person

- Discontinue use of offering plates, baskets, et cetera passed in pews.
- Encourage online giving.
- Use centrally located (at entries or exits, along designated single-direction pathway) collection units.
- Counters should wear masks and gloves and practice physical distancing during the count.
- Offer prayer that specifically mentions online offering to honor and encourage online giving.

Outdoors

Goal: Prevent passing of germs and observe physical distancing rules

- Keep in mind best practices for physical distancing in outdoor spaces, too, including wearing masks and maintaining 6 feet of distance. This applies to drive-in worship, where windows may be down and cars are parked close together. If singing, at least 14 feet of distance is required between individuals or family units.
- Thoroughly review the outdoor meeting guidelines

Pew Paraphernalia

Goal: Prevent germ sharing and germs that stay on surfaces for longer

- Remove all individual items in pews (Bibles, hymnals, pens/pencils, offering envelopes, attendance registers, crayons/toys, prayer cards, removeable seat cushions).
- Use projection for liturgy and announcements.
- Use single-use bulletins with song lyrics, et cetera that are handed out by individuals who have sanitized/are wearing gloves and disposed of as people leave service.

Seating

Goal: Prevent passing of germs and observe physical distancing rules

- Encourage physical distancing measured from family to family (at least 6 feet between each family).
- Consider assigned seating.
- Consider dismissing from worship by family, row, or section of the congregation.
- Restrict seating closest to platform.
- Upholstered seating cannot be properly cleaned between uses, so alternative seating will be needed. Consider using metal, plastic, or wooden chairs in a fellowship hall for worship instead.

Singing/Spoken Liturgy

Goal: Ensure rules of physical distancing can be followed

- Group singing is dangerous indoors; there should be no in-person singing.
- Consider playing recorded choral music that you've prepared for online worship.

- Use alternative recorded and live instrumental music (no live brass or wind instruments).
- Teach American Sign Language to sing hymns in a new way.
- Suspend all choir practice.
- Raised voices/shouting can be as dangerous as coughing in terms of spreading the virus.

Volunteer Roles

Goal: Show volunteers they are valued while you are keeping them safe.

- Allow for new roles to be created for ushers who may be in higher-risk category.
- Take time to re-vision what roles that previously were centralized around physical elements/interaction; can you give people a different purpose in their roles and not just leave them behind?
- There will be a need for a sanitation team to keep things clean.
- Consider temperature checks for all staff and volunteers.

REOPENING PHASES

When first returning to in-person worship, continue to consider yourself an online congregation, as not all members will choose to be in our building/s at first, or at all.

It is also important to remember that this is not likely to be a linear progression through the phases, nor will this be a one-time process. We may move back and forth between phases many times.

High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place.

PHASE ONE:

In-Person Worship

- Gatherings of 10 or fewer are allowed.
- Limit gatherings to those that can be held virtually (by remote viewing) for vulnerable populations and consider video streaming outdoors, or drive-in options for services.
- Continue worship services remotely, offering members opportunities to participate (scripture reading, children's message, music, etc.).
- Follow all CDC guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting.
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals) should be kept to less than 10 in attendance. If you need to help set a limit, consider using immediate family. We advise only publicizing the date and location to those who are on the approved list to prevent hurt feelings or awkward situations.
- Keep office functions as limited as possible to ensure essential operations. Those in the office should be wearing masks; if you have more than one person in the office, make sure that surfaces, including the phone, are regularly sanitized.

Preschools, Children & Youth

- Generally most of our preschools, childcare, children and youth ministries follow the public school guidance, which is closed through the end of this school year. The [CDC has strict guidelines](#) for limited reopening of preschools and childcare to assist with children of essential workers. It is difficult for children and youth to practice physical distancing. If you plan to reopen any preschool, childcare or children/youth activities prior to public schools reopening, we ask you to be in touch with your District Superintendent.
- Consider creative online VBS and youth activity options to keep children and youth engaged, making sure to honor the On-Line Safety section of the [Safe Sanctuaries](#) internet safety guidelines.

Missions & Outreach

- No mission trips, including youth trips, recommended through the summer.
- Visits to senior living facilities, homes, and hospitals prohibited.

- All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.

Groups

- **Church groups:** Continue to meet remotely.
- **Other building users:** Consider allowing building users back in if they are and are able to observe all restrictions and protocols above, including the rule limiting gatherings to 10 or fewer.

Church Staff

- Continue to telework where possible.
- Continue to clean and sanitize often.
- Require masks if more than one person is in the office at the same time.
- Allow high-risk/vulnerable employees and volunteers to work from home.

PHASE TWO:

High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place.

In-Person Worship

- **Churches with fewer than 50 in worship and adequate ventilation** might consider in-person options **ONLY** if your space allows for family units to sit 6 feet apart and you are able to clean and ensure safety for all.
- Continue holding remote worship so that those who are restricted from coming because of high risk or fear will not be excluded. No groups larger than 50 at a time (The number is not as important as the distancing; we recommend using only 25% of your worship space.).
- Be sure you have a plan for limiting the number of attendees and how to handle overflow.
- Follow all CDC guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting.
- Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading droplets/aerosols which can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air. A cloth mask is unlikely to be enough to protect you or your neighbor. We recommend against singing in the sanctuary when the congregation is gathered.
- Use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Consider removing prayerbooks and Bibles if you will have multiple services. Use bulletins (do not reuse) or screens as alternatives.
- Distancing: Have people spread out in sanctuary space with one family unit per pew; keep empty pews between families. Explore meeting in a fellowship hall or outdoors if your space is small.
- We recommend against offering a fellowship/coffee hour. Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling.
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals, confirmations) could take place in a more traditional way, with careful attention to guest lists so as to keep under the 50 person limit, and physical distancing plans.

Preschools, Children & Youth

- It is still too early for Vacation Bible School, mission trips, and other programs of this nature.

Missions & Outreach

- No mission trips, including youth trips, are recommended through the summer.
- All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.
- Visits to senior living facilities, homes, and hospitals are prohibited.

Groups

- **Church groups:** Continue to meet remotely.
- Don't yet have small groups? This is an opportunity to renew relationships and perhaps start some small groups within your congregation. As conditions shift, these small groups can provide spiritual and emotional support to one another, and offer a setting for mission.

Other building users:

- Consider allowing building users back in if they are able to observe all restrictions and protocols above.
- Smaller churches (under 50 members) could consider holding in-person membership meetings if official business is required.
- Allow building users/renters to resume operations, with a plan to address cleaning needs and agreement to observe gathering and distancing protocols.
- Post signs indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Maintain a good stock of tissue, soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels for drying hands.
- Clean the building regularly and between user groups, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
- If you become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, put your communication plan into action, and [cooperate fully with contact tracers](#).

Church Staff

- Continue to telework where possible.
- Continue to clean and sanitize often.

- Require masks if more than one person is in the office at the same time.
- Allow high-risk/vulnerable employees and volunteers to work from home.

PHASE THREE:

In-Person Worship

- Continue holding remote worship so that those who are restricted from coming because of high risk or fear will not be excluded.
- Continue to observe physical distancing within the worship space ONLY if your space allows for family units to sit 6 feet apart and you are able to clean and ensure safety for all.
- Be sure you have a plan for limiting the number of attendees and how to handle overflow.
- Consider outdoor options.
- Follow all CDC guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting.
- Watch for public health recommendations on group singing as we arrive at this phase. The coordinating team will use the latest recommendations from the CDC and Maine public health officials.
- Continue to use no-touch alternatives for passing the peace, collecting offering, and liturgical resources. Consider removing prayerbooks and Bibles if you will have multiple services. Use bulletins (do not reuse) or screens as alternatives.
- We recommend against offering a fellowship/coffee hour. Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling.

Preschools, Children & Youth

- It is still too early for Vacation Bible School, mission trips, and other programs of this nature; wait until schools reopen.

Missions & Outreach

- No mission trips, including youth trips, are recommended through the summer.
- All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.
- Visits to senior living facilities, homes, and hospitals are prohibited.

Groups

- **Church groups:**
 - Continue to meet remotely for vulnerable population.

- Some meetings and small groups of fewer than 10 may meet if they wear masks and observe physical distancing.
- No food/beverage.
- Limit to under 1 hour.
- No singing.
- **Other building users:** May resume operations according to all the restrictions for phases 2–3, with a plan to address cleaning needs and agreement to observe all protocols.

Church Staff

- Continue to telework where possible.
- Continue to clean and sanitize often.
- Require masks if more than one person is in the office at the same time.
- Allow high-risk/vulnerable employees and volunteers to work from home.

SAFETY ACTIONS:

SAFETY ACTIONS: HYGIENE

Promote healthy hygiene practices (Phases 1–3)

- Encourage everyone to use a cloth face covering (mask) at all gatherings and whenever they are in the building. (Exception: children younger than 2 years old.)
- Not using a cloth face covering may be appropriate at times for individuals who have trouble breathing or need assistance to remove their mask.
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including:
 - Soap
 - Hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer)
 - Tissues
 - No-touch trash cans
- Consider posting signs on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 and promote everyday protective measures
 - Physical distancing
 - Mask wearing
 - Handwashing
 - Not sharing objects
 - Recognizing environmental hazards (for example, prop doors open to limit touching the doorknob)

These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information.

SAFETY ACTIONS: CLEANING

Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation (Phases 1–3)

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily, and clean shared objects between use.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep them away from children.
- Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of Legionnaire's disease and other diseases associated with water.

These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information.

SAFETY ACTIONS: DEALING WITH ILLNESS

PLAN FOR WHEN SOMEONE BECOMES SICK (PHASES 1–3)

- Encourage staff or congregants who are sick to stay at home.
- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits COVID-like symptoms during hours of operation, and ensure that children are not left without adult supervision.
- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick at the facility to their home or a healthcare facility.
- Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or other applicable laws in accordance with religious practices.
- Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use the area until after cleaning and disinfection; wait 24 hours to clean and disinfect to reduce risk to the individuals cleaning.
 - If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- Advise sick staff and congregants not to return to the facility until they have met **CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation**.

CLOSING (PHASES 1–3)

- Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- In the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the community, it is strongly suggested to close, then properly clean and disinfect the area of the building where the individual was present.

SAFETY ACTIONS: OPERATIONS

Maintain healthy operations (Phases 1–3)

- Encourage staff who are sick to stay at home.
- Implement flexible sick leave and related flexible policies and practices for staff (e.g., allow work from home, if feasible).
- Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Monitor absenteeism and create a roster of trained back-up staff.
- Communicate clearly with staff (and congregants) about actions being taken to protect their health.

Train all staff (Phases 1–3)

- Train all clergy and staff in all safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that social distancing is maintained.

These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE RE-OPENING

- Has your insurance company weighed in on benchmarks for reopening, and for operating any programs? Your District Superintendent? How will these influence your decision?
- Will you maintain an online streaming option once you are back together worshipping in physical space? How will that need to adjust when there is also in-person worship happening?
- How many people can your worship space hold if you are worshipping in family groups sitting 6 feet apart?
- How will you discourage the receiving line after church and/or congregating after worship services?
- When in earlier phases of relaunch, how will you cap attendance at events so there is room for members of the community to join you and so you don't go over guidelines?
- How can you encourage small group gatherings with the building of small group, discipleship systems, etc in the earlier phases of relaunching – possibly even before we move into Phase One? How might you continue these when in-person worship resumes?
- How will you ensure sanitation and disinfection in regards to communal spaces?
 - Worship bulletin disposal, prayerbooks, etc
 - Areas where small groups gather during the week
 - Nurseries and/or play places
 - Pews or chairs following worship
 - Doorknobs, bathrooms, other areas that people touch when in your building
- How will you update your building use agreements to reflect the new realities of COVID-19?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual while maintaining privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you do a more intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- How will you communicate your safety plan and best practices to the congregation?

(THIS REOPENING DOCUMENT WAS ADAPTED FOR CALVARY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FROM NEUMC AND WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES GUIDELINES)