

St. Mary's United Church of Christ
COVID-19 Protocol for In-Church Gathering
Issued April 2021

Dear Staff and Members of St. Mary's UCC,

For one whole year, the pandemic has dramatically changed our lives and the way we worship. The pain, frustration, and anxiety it caused is real and ongoing. As a congregation, we grieve our inability to see each other on a regular basis, hold in-person ministry meetings, visit our shut-ins, gather for fellowship, participate in gatherings to celebrate weddings, remember and honor loved ones at funeral services, and just get together to talk and share stories of what's going on in our lives. We all want to gather again, but we have to consider how to do so in a safe way and consider our most vulnerable members.

It is essential for us to remember that Church never actually closed during this period. Our mission and calling to serve remains the same. We've learned to worship, pray, and serve others in very creative ways to minimize the risk of virus transmission. From increased use of online communication to Zoom meetings to video chats, we continue to serve the congregants and support our community and those in need.

We look forward to gathering again with eagerness. As restrictions are lifting, we face difficult decisions, including when to resume in-person services and how to do so in a safe and structured manner. We are realistic about possible risks, threats, and challenges that complicate the safe return to in-church gatherings. The Transition Team is diligent in its approach to meet the needs and protect the congregation's health while following the guidance provided by Federal, State, and local Government officials.

This guide provides information to staff, ministry chairs, the congregation, visitors, and volunteers to ensure the health and safety of all who enter St. Mary's. We appreciate everyone's cooperation during these times of uncertainty.

The Transition Team:
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Introduction

We recognize our return to in-person worship is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Those most vulnerable (those individuals over 65 and all individuals with preexisting conditions) are encouraged to be abundantly cautious when considering when to return to in-church worship. Virtual daily prayer and Sunday services will continue to allow everyone to make the best and safest decision for them and their families. The reopening plan follows the directives and recommendations/orders of the Centers for Disease Control, Governor Hogan, and the Maryland Health Department.



Our Basic Guidelines

- No physical touching when greeting each other (maintain 6-ft. distance)
- No fellowship following the service
- Masks must remain on at all times, covering nose and mouth
- No access to the downstairs until further notice
- Only designated staff/volunteers continue to have access to office using current protocols.

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- If you have experienced any of the following symptoms, PLEASE stay home:
 - Cough
 - Fever over 100.4 or chills
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Been in contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 days? (*exception: if a healthcare professional was in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days but was dressed in **full PPE** then they can enter*)
 - Had a positive or pending COVID-19 test in the last 10 days

St. Mary's U.C.C. Reopening Plan

Worship Participants (please arrive 10 – 15 minutes before service to allow sufficient time for check-in, collection of information, etc. as specified below):

- All participants will be greeted by volunteers stationed at each door designated as an entrance.
- All participants over 5 years of age are required to properly wear a mask completely covering the nose and mouth inside the church at all times. Participants are encouraged to bring/wear their own masks to in-person services. The church has a limited stock of masks and will provide, if needed.
- Participants are encouraged to bring pre-printed bulletins with them to in-person services and dispose of them in the designated receptacle at each door once church is dismissed. (There will be limited copies available at the entrance, if needed.)
- Volunteers will collect names and contact information at the door to maintain attendance records for contact tracing and monitoring sanctuary capacity.
- Collection plates will be placed at each entrance to collect any physical offering envelopes.
- Hand sanitizing stations are available throughout the building, and participants are encouraged to sanitize their hands regularly.
- Pews are marked off to ensure proper social distancing is maintained—members in the same household can be seated together.
- Participants are encouraged to collect anything they need before the service and stay in their pew once seated.

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- Restrooms are limited to one person at a time or multiple family members where some type of assistance is needed. Each restroom has a single stall for use. So if someone is inside, please wait until the bathroom is empty to enter.
 - Sanitation instructions will be posted in each restroom.
 - Restrooms in the basement are not available for use because of the added effort needed to disinfect the stairwell, hallways, and bathrooms.
- On Sundays with communion, participants will receive a “communion set” as they enter the sanctuary. Communion will then be received in the pews. Participants will then discard the packaging as they exit the sanctuary.

Worship Leader Guidelines:

While we will continue with online streaming of services, we are excited to welcome back our worship volunteers to assist with worship leadership. Sharing leadership and participation in worship is a critical part of regathering. Public safety is a priority for anyone who assists with worship leadership. Just as you rehearse the readings as a lay reader, or prepare your movements as an acolyte, so we need to consider public safety with every part of worship.

- Worship leaders and volunteers will practice social distancing
- Lay readers will use printed sheets for the readings and discard those readings after worship.
- The organist will continue to play worship music during services.
- We are eliminating all sung hymns and choir numbers during the service to reduce the risks of exposure. (We will continue this practice until more facts are documented by the scientific community relevant to safety.)
- The Choral and Bell Choir Directors continue to pursue other means of providing musical selections during service. (Other music is encouraged as long as it is not a wind instrument. Worship Ministry members welcome suggestions.)
- There will be no ushers for offering or communion. Offering collection plates are at each door (along with individual communion when scheduled).
- If you would like to host a wedding or funeral in the church, please contact the church office, and a church staff person will be in touch to arrange for the necessary protocols.

Staff

Church and Ministry developed a plan at the onset of the pandemic to allow staff to continue performing their assigned duties in a safe and healthy manner. The current plan and established guidelines will continue until further notice:

- Continue work from home as duties and responsibilities allow.
- Continue to evaluate the safety of church activities and create plans for the continuation and development of all our ministries.
- Continue to reinforce social distancing (schedules for office staff so that only one person is in the office at a time). Social distancing applies to money counters and other visitors to ensure there is no overlap of people on any given day.

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- Signage will be posted to prevent “unauthorized” access to office and other common areas.
- Continue to ensure proper cleaning and disinfecting of common areas by Cleaning Contractor.
- Re-enforce appropriate precautions when multiple people are in the church (social distancing, wearing masks, hand sanitizing, etc.)

Church and Ministry Committee:

Church and Ministry continue to monitor staff, visitor, and volunteer activities to ensure all health and safety protocols are followed as follows:

- Develop and present universal, electronic Covid-19 related training for all staff, committee chairs, and volunteers to ensure the health and safety of all.
- The Worship Ministry will coordinate a volunteer list and ensure training is completed in a timely manner.
- Incorporate pandemic protocol guidance into St. Mary's safe church guidance.
- Communicate with staff and worship participants to address safety and health concerns as regulatory guidance and protocols change.
- Continue virtual meetings until further notice.
- Work closely with cleaning contractors to ensure enhanced commercial sanitation and thorough cleaning of the sanctuary, offices, vestry, restroom, and other common and high-touch areas.

Other Information:

- No access to rooms not in use (appropriate signage will be posted).
- No access to the downstairs until further notice.
- Nursery room is closed until further notice to reduce the risk of contact spreading.
- Only selected entrances into the building will be open. Please enter and exit via the assigned entrances.

This guide establishes a minimal set of standards including social distancing, sanitation, personal protective equipment, and illness protocols to resume some of our faith traditions. The guidance provided is subject to change as the medical and scientific communities learn more about COVID-19. The guidance also reinforces the importance of following the most up-to-date scientific and medical information from the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, the Maryland Health Department, Governor Hogan, and the United Church of Christ National, Conference, and Association offices.

Through prayer and our trust in God, we've adopted new ways to keep in touch with our members, neighbors, and friends. We face continued challenges and changes as we take these initial steps to come back together safely.