

Relaunch of In-Person Ministry
Church of the Good Shepherd
5-18-20

We all have had to deal with many new and unusual circumstances during the last couple of months. "Safer-at-home" directives, the closing of in-person education at our schools, retirement living facilities on lock down, beloved friends and family ill with CoVid-19, and more have been a way of life. That list does not mention the shock to our economy.

During this time, Good Shepherd has been worshipping online each week. Many people have said how they appreciate online worship and want it to continue. We intend to do that. We also have found new ways to meet together, study together, and so on. An online campus has formed for Good Shepherd in addition to our physical campus on S.W. 15th. We celebrate this new growth and look forward to its future development.

As things begin to open up, we are going to be looking at some form of in-person worship. A Relaunch team has been formed at Good Shepherd to lead that process. We have been waiting on guidance from our Bishop, Jimmy Nunn, and his district superintendents on the process. I have provided below the Guidelines sent from Bishop Nunn and his cabinet on the afternoon of May 15th.

My hope is that the Guidelines below will inform you of the concerns that need to be considered as we move toward some form of a phased in start of in-person worship. I have deleted a multitude of internet links to various documents from the CDC, state government, etc. in order to make the size of the document more manageable. All italicized, underlined, bold or colored sections are as is from the original document. I invite you to read and consider the guiding document provided below:

Letter From Bishop Nunn and His Cabinet
dated 5-15-20

...Understanding that the Oklahoma Annual Conference is a large, diverse conference made up of 480 churches in all 77 counties, as well as numerous outreach ministries throughout the state, this guidance is meant to assist your church/ministry leadership teams in making the most informed, medically-guided, data-driven, contextual decisions.

The purpose of this document is to provide the best guidance possible for safe and prudent plans for the Preparation/Reopening of the majority of UM churches/ministries in OK. In this time of transition, we call upon pastors and leaders of UM churches/ministries to take very seriously their responsibility to make responsible, considered, and contextual decisions utilizing the information made available to them in this document. This document establishes a duty of care for our churches/ministries. We expect and require that all leaders of our congregations/ministries remain vigilant in observing and responding to changes in the numbers of cases of COVID-19. This could mean that, should infection rates rise, churches/ministries will need to close after reopening to protect the people in their care and reopen again at a later time.

Guiding Principles

Scriptures

The Greatest Commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind 'and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:36-40)

Paul's admonition to the Philippians, our 2020 Annual Conference theme: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." (2:4)

Paul's encouragement to the church at Rome: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good... Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." (12:9, 12)

Social Principles

“Stewardship of health is the responsibility of each person to whom health has been entrusted. Creating the personal, environmental and social conditions in which health can thrive is a joint responsibility – public and private” (§162V).

Three General Rules of Methodism

- Do no harm.
- Do good.
- Attend upon the ordinances of God.

Common Expectations

- * If you have not already done so, create and implement a Reopening Team to guide the process of reopening for your local setting.
- * Keep up to date with all World Health Organization (WHO) and Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and recommendations, as well as the state of Oklahoma’s OURS (Open Up and Recover Safely) plan. These should be the primary sources on COVID-19 and other health related issues. Recommendations change frequently in light of new data and information, so please check resources on a regular basis.
- * Understand the risks involved in your context. Some churches/ministries have greater COVID-19 exposure issues than others. It is also vital to seek professional medical, legal, and insurance advice to weigh the impacts of potential liabilities.
- * No church/ministry in the Oklahoma Conference of the UMC is required to reopen until that church/ministry deems the conditions are safe in their context. Consult the Oklahoma State Department of Health website to determine numbers in your county, city, town, and zip.
- * Follow any guidelines issued by your local municipality when those are stricter than either these guidelines or those produced by the State of Oklahoma.
- * Though we all pray for the development of a vaccine to alleviate this virus, presently the development, distribution, and effectiveness of a vaccine is uncertain. Prepare for an extensive time without the assurance of vaccine protection.

Reopening and Ongoing Guidance

There are many steps required before in-person worship and programming can return to any sense of normalcy.

If possible, offer online worship, care, and discipleship opportunities until the most vulnerable members of your congregation can physically return to active participation.

Preparation

May 15th through and beyond your reopening

- * Determine which areas of the church need to be prepped, cleaned, and sanitized.
- CDC Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting:
- * Develop a communication plan to help spread information quickly and efficiently to the congregation (phone chains, emails, social media, newsletters, etc.)
 - * Determine what aspects of worship will be maintained and what will be not be possible until a later time. Communicate the reasons for these decisions.
 - * Prepare to take attendance at all church/ministry functions for the foreseeable future so that you will be able to inform those present should anyone in attendance test positive for the virus.
 - * Test HVAC systems and prepare them for use whenever people are present to provide ventilation and comfortable temperatures.

- * Train ushers and other hospitality staff about how they will deal with those who do not follow the church's expectations regarding wearing masks, seating arrangements and any other expectations a church may impose on those worshipping during the reopen phase.

Post Signage Throughout the Facility

- * Post a sign at every entrance reminding congregants that they should not enter if they are a member of an at-risk population.
- * Post signs reminding people to not enter if they have been exposed to someone exhibiting fever or those who have tested positive for COVID-19.
- * Post signs reminding people of the importance of face masks, social distancing, and frequent hand washing.
- * Post signs in restrooms reminding people of the proper hand washing techniques.

Complete this Checklist

- * Create a clear document to distribute to all staff and pertinent volunteers regarding the required protocols they are to follow and plans they are to fulfill. Carefully review the document to insure their understanding and agreement.
- * Ensure you have a 1-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.
- * Develop a congregational seating plan for social distancing; ensure at least 6 feet distance.
- * Walk through each step of in-person worship multiple times.

Re-opening

It is recommended that OK UM churches/ministries re-open for In-Person Worship when your Relaunch Team determines that the church/ministry is prepared to do so as safely as possible but we recommend no sooner than June 7th. Gathering people in your buildings should not be done until it is safe in your community to do so and you have completed everything noted in the Preparation Phase above.

What are the guidelines?

- * Carefully review case trends in your community which are posted daily. Also carefully review the weekly epidemiologist and surveillance report which comes out each Friday
- * Consult with medical professionals familiar with your community

Recommendations for Worship

- * Continue online worship and online small groups.
- * Record attendance of every person in attendance.
- * Masks should be properly worn by everyone over the age of 10.
 - * Encourage people to bring their own masks/hand sanitizer, but also have an ample supply on hand.
 - * Do not allow any person over 10 to enter or remain in the building without properly wearing a mask.
 - * All worship participants and leaders must wear masks, except when speaking or singing.
- * Maintain a distance of 12 feet from anyone singing or leading.
- * It is clearly documented that singing spreads the virus due to the heightened risk of droplet spreading, no choirs or congregational singing should take place at this time. This includes while wearing masks.
- * If possible, use separate entrances and exits for the facility.

- * Leave as many interior doors open as possible to limit personal touch to door handles, etc. and to help provide better air circulation.
- * Mark clear pathways on the floor to maintain social distancing and prevent congestion.
- * Clean and sanitize every room used by the public after each service.
- * Clean all surfaces with soap and water followed by a disinfectant.
 - * Encourage parishioners to arrive no earlier than 15 minutes prior to or leave no later than 15 minutes following a service.
 - * Train staff/volunteers to keep people from entering the facility until public spaces are sanitized.
- * Seating should be limited with six feet of social distancing enforced except for family household units.
 - * Ushers should seat people in the sanctuary from front to back and recess the people from back to front.
 - * Congregants should not be allowed to sit where they wish, but instead be directed to the next available row, beginning with the front row.
- * Remove all writing supplies, hymnals, Bibles, etc., to prevent them from being touched by multiple people.
- * Written orders of worship or bulletins are not recommended. If possible, screens should be used as alternatives. If bulletins are provided, DO NOT take up or reuse them.
- * Churches/ministries offering multiple worship services should have congregants wait in their cars until every room used by the public has been properly sanitized.
- * If you plan to do a baptism or Holy Communion, please refer to further guidance documents found at the conference website.
- * No offering plate should be passed. Instead use online giving, a stationary giving box or mail. Counters should wear gloves/masks.
- * All indoor gatherings including weddings, funerals, and support groups should follow these guidelines.
- * No food or beverage service.
- * Have greeters encourage people to leave the building rather than mingle.
- * No in-person meetings of youth, children, or infants. Do not provide childcare.
- * Postpone in-person Vacation Bible School.

Procedures for handling COVID-19 cases in your church

- * Notify local health officials and district superintendent if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality.
- * 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.
- * Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- * Close off areas used by sick persons and do not use that area. Wait 24 hours to clean and disinfect to reduce risk to individuals cleaning. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting.
- * Advise sick staff and congregants not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.

Travel Guidance

- * Postpone mission trips or any other trips.
- * Regularly communicate that anyone who travels outside of the area should refrain from participation in in-person activities at the church for 14 days.

Obviously, the letter from Bishop Nunn above shows that there are many concerns to be worked through and many changes required. I do plan on providing drive through communion on June 7th in addition to the option of providing your own communion elements at home. Thank you for your support of the ministry of Church of the Good Shepherd.

*Hope and Confidence in Christ,
Michael Burkett
Lead Pastor*