

A Plan for Outdoor Gatherings

Decatur & Concord United Methodist Churches

On August 10, 2020, Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor announced new guidance from the Holston Conference COVID-19 Task Force. This guidance allows for churches to “offer outdoor opportunities for worship, service, and connection.” Bishop Taylor shares the hope [that] these outdoor opportunities will help our churches feel connected and full of hope that the best is, indeed, still to come. These opportunities include worship, small groups including youth, adult, and older adult, scouting, and recovery programs.”

This plan for outdoor gatherings is in response to this new guidance.

In analyzing the spread of COVID-19 and the safety of in-person gatherings, two tools will be used as a guide.

1. COVID Risk Level Map developed by the Harvard Global Health Institute | This tool is used by the Holston Conference to measure the level of community spread in each county.
<https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>
2. COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool developed by Georgia Institute of Technology | This tool gives a county by county risk assessment that at least 1 COVID-19 positive individual will be present at an event.
https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/?fbclid=IwAR1DIKm0kE1hN6mmg3Q0TA8N5F_lgwSqXlaCYp6FAtL0s0Z4YtMubVMme64

Guidelines for Outdoor Gatherings

Overview of Guidelines

- Masks will be worn at all times while on church property.
- The church building remains closed.
- Social distancing will be maintained.
- A record of attendance and contact information will be maintained for each event and filed with the church office.
- A checklist of COVID procedures will be created and filed with the church office for each event.
- Online and virtual opportunities for connection will be promoted and encouraged.
- All groups, classes, scouts utilizing the church shall follow the same guidelines for worship gatherings. Scout groups will submit their COVID procedures for approval by the church trustees to ensure that all guidelines are in keeping with the below approved guidelines. (St. Mary’s Legacy Clinic operates under alternative approved COVID guidelines)

Detail of Guidelines

1. Basic Protocols
 - a. In-person worship and group opportunities will vary due to weather, volunteer support, and the maintenance of the online worship service.
 - b. The church building will only be open to volunteers and leaders during this time. Following worship, a volunteer cleaning crew will sanitize high touch surfaces.
 - c. Those over 65 and those with serious underlying health conditions are encouraged to remain home and participate in online or audio worship.

- d. People who are symptomatic, have a fever, have been exposed to the virus, or have traveled to a hot spot are to refrain from attending in-person gatherings for the quarantine period established by the Tennessee Department of Health.
 - e. Social distancing of 6 feet will be observed among households. To help facilitate this, during worship and small group activities, participants will bring their own lawn chairs (a limited number of sanitized chairs may be made available to help those with mobility issues), markers will be placed on the ground to indicate an appropriate distance, and the congregation will be instructed in ways to greet one another while maintaining appropriate distance.
 - f. All participants and leaders will have their attendance and contact information recorded. This data will be entered in our electronic database or filed with the church office, within 48 hours, to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a possible exposure.
 - g. There will be a check-in station where people can register their contact information and receive a mask if they do not already have one.
 - h. All participants and leaders are required to wear a face covering, upon exiting their vehicle, while they are on church property. Participants are encouraged to bring one from home, however, a hospitality volunteer will have a mask for those that do not have one. Those who cannot or refuse to wear a face covering (including young children) will remain at home.
 - i. Alternative face coverings or protection will be explored for our worship leaders to help facilitate those that rely on lip reading to communicate.
 - i. Participants and leaders may receive a temperature check and may be asked recommended COVID screening questions.
 - j. For each event, an event checklist will be completed prior to each event to ensure that these procedures are maintained. This checklist will be filed with the church office no later than 48 hours after the event.
2. Touch surfaces will be minimized.
- a. Online giving will continue to be encouraged and a stationary generosity box will be available for people to make their in-person donations. Money counters will take appropriate precautions of handwashing when handling all financial collections.
 - b. Bulletins and other common items will be kept to a minimum. People are asked to remove all trash or other items they bring with them to worship.
 - c. Microphones will not be shared among worship leaders.
3. Worship Protocols
- a. No children's church will take place. Children will remain with their parents during worship. Creative ways to engage children will be explored by the worship planning team.
 - b. No choir or congregational singing will be offered. Small ensembles or soloists, or prerecorded music will be offered with proper distancing.
4. Miscellaneous Protocols
- a. Preparations will begin to prepare the in-door worship space for in-person worship. This includes finalizing the recording/online worship studio, removing or "roping off" pews to establish distance, creating interior markers for distancing, ensuring continued adequate cleaning and sanitation supplies, ensuring volunteers are available and prepared for indoor in-person worship, the congregation will be surveyed on their receptivity to indoor worship at the time.
 - b. St. Mary's Legacy Clinic will continue to operate in the fellowship hall following their COVID procedures.

Additional of Guidelines

St. Mary's Legacy Clinic

St. Mary's Legacy Health Clinic will use fellowship hall and bathrooms as they utilize their own COVID protocols that are attached as an addendum. This exception has received prior approval by the bishop.

Online Worship

Online and Audio worship will continue to be a viable form of worship for the foreseeable future. The church should plan to resource this form of worship to continue to connect as many people as possible. This learning of online worship will continue following the COVID pandemic to connect more people with the love of Jesus and to connect those who remain homebound.

Funerals

The Christian funeral is a time when the gospel of resurrection is proclaimed in the face of death and the body of the deceased is commended back to God. During this pandemic, a full funeral or celebration of life is unsafe and unwise. Funerals will be offered as graveside committals only (until indoor, in-person worship is offered). These protocols will be maintained:

1. All participants must wear a face covering. This includes the participants of any additional rites or services (military honors will follow their own procedures).
2. The prayer of committal is essential to the Christian service, and this involves the pastor touching the casket or vessel. Only the pastor will touch the casket.
3. Crowds should be kept to a minimum and the congregation and friends should be encouraged to consider alternative means of expressing condolences.
4. Families will be discouraged from having a public visitation or receiving of friends until a time when large groups are considered safe.
5. Families will be encouraged to consider delaying a full celebration of life until a time when the larger groups are considered safe.
6. When the danger of the pandemic has passed, the congregation might consider holding a church-wide or community service for those who died during the pandemic.

Weddings

All weddings must follow the protocols established for in-person worship.

Future Protocols

Future protocols will address indoor gatherings.