

# Protocols for In-Person Worship

## Decatur & Concord United Methodist Churches (May 2021)

On April 23, 2021, the Holston Conference COVID-19 Task Force announced that on May 1, 2021 the Holston Conference Protocol “Taking Steps Forward Faithfully and Safely: A Plan for Returning to In-Person Worship in the Holston Annual Conference during the COVID-19 Pandemic” will be lifted. This enables greater flexibility on behalf of a local church make decisions on how to continue to respond to our global pandemic.

While the specifics of the protocols are lifted, churches are expected to follow CDC and all recommended governmental guidelines. Additionally, Holston Conference Churches are still required to wear masks during in-person gatherings.

Following this guidance, the Decatur/Concord Charge Protocol Planning and Preparation Team (Protocol Team) makes recommendations in this document. These recommendations supersede all previous recommendations. Once these recommendations are approved by the church councils of each church they are the in effect.

In analyzing the spread of COVID-19 and the safety of in-person gatherings, these tools and resources 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=IwAR1DIKm0kE1hN6mmq3Q0TA8N5F\\_IgwSqXlaCYp6FAtLOs0Z4YtMubVMme64](https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/?fbclid=IwAR1DIKm0kE1hN6mmq3Q0TA8N5F_IgwSqXlaCYp6FAtLOs0Z4YtMubVMme64)
3. Tennessee Department of Health County Data Snapshot.  
<https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov/data/county-data-snapshot.html>
4. “When You’ve Been Fully Vaccinated: How to Protect Yourself and Others,” CDC,  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>
5. “CDC director: Masked, fully vaccinated people can safely attend worship services,” *Religion News Service*, April 27, 2021, [https://religionnews.com/2021/04/27/cdc-director-masked-fully-vaccinated-people-can-attend-worship-indoors/?fbclid=IwAR1zktL3dWomcsiSCDNvg4ddgtpxxFc\\_7hC5RStZCkEos6ObyohBCrM53js](https://religionnews.com/2021/04/27/cdc-director-masked-fully-vaccinated-people-can-attend-worship-indoors/?fbclid=IwAR1zktL3dWomcsiSCDNvg4ddgtpxxFc_7hC5RStZCkEos6ObyohBCrM53js)
6. “Choosing Safer Activities,” CDC, April 27, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/participate-in-activities.html>

# Guidelines for Gatherings

## Overview of Guidelines

- Masks will be worn at all times upon entering the church facility, per Holston Conference guidelines.
- Social distancing will be maintained.
- Hand sanitizer and non-touch trash receptacles will be plentiful.
- Online and virtual opportunities for connection will be promoted and encouraged.
- If our county's 7-day running average of new daily COVID-19 cases is 8 or above (approx. 66 per 100,000), indoor worship will be suspended for following the Sunday. All governmental safety directives or recommendations regarding worship and gatherings will be followed.

## Detail of Guidelines

1. Basic Protocols
  - a. People who are symptomatic, have a fever, or have been exposed to the virus are to refrain from attending in-person worship for 14 days or until they receive a negative COVID test.
    - i. Those who are fully vaccinated may attend following a known exposure unless they are experiencing symptoms, per CDC guidance.
  - b. Social distancing of 6 feet will be observed among households. To help facilitate this, pews will be removed or marked in such a way to ensure proper distance.
    - i. If tables or other seating arrangements are used, households will be encouraged to sit together. Appropriate distance among households will be maintained.
  - c. All participants and leaders are required to wear a face covering upon entering the church facility. Those who cannot or refuse to wear a face covering (including young children) will remain at home.
    - i. If worship leaders are able to maintain appropriate distance, masks can be removed while leading worship or singing.
2. Facility Protocols
  - a. Clear signage detailing these protocols and guidance will be displayed around the church.
  - b. Hand sanitizer will be available at multiple locations throughout the building.
  - c. All trash receptacles will be "no touch."
  - d. Any drinking fountains will be closed.
  - e. Restroom procedures:
    - i. Restroom use will be discouraged.
    - ii. The doors of the main campus restrooms will remain propped open.
    - iii. Signs on proper handwashing will be displayed above the sink area.
  - f. The trustees will ensure that adequate ventilation of the worship and gathering spaces is employed.
  - g. The physical space will be adapted to ensure proper distancing. In the sanctuary pews will be removed or "roped off" to establish distance.
3. 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.
  - b. Bulletins and other common items will be kept to a minimum.
4. Worship Protocols

- a. Singing and Music. Small ensembles (6 or fewer participants) or soloists, with proper distancing, are encouraged. Congregational singing, while properly masked, is permitted.
    - i. Any instrument that requires breath to produce sound will not be used indoors.
  - b. Those speaking will have a microphone and will be encouraged to speak at a low voice.
- 5. Small Groups
  - a. Small Groups or Sunday School classes that wish to meet will work to schedule space that allows for adequate distancing.
  - b. Church leadership teams are permitted to meet, in person.
  - c. Additional groups may use the facility if they receive approval from the pastor and church council.
  - d. All groups and leadership teams must follow all protocols.
  - e. A checklist of the protocols will be provided to each group.
  - f. Food and drinks will not be consumed indoors.
- 6. Food Service
  - a. If food is to be offered, it will only be consumed outdoors with households properly distanced.
  - b. During food prep and service, all food staff will be properly masked.
  - c. Food will not be served in a self-served buffet. All food will be served by staff. During the serving of food, all will be asked to be properly masked. Hand sanitizer will be freely available.
  - d. Following food service, all surfaces will be properly cleaned and sanitized.
- 7. Exposure:
  - a. In the event that someone attended worship and was in their infectious period of COVID-19, the pastor will be made aware, appropriate contact tracing will take place, and in-person church worship services will be suspended for 14 days following the contact.
  - b. If the pastor or pastor's family tests positive for COVID-19 or is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms prior to a test result, in-person worship will be suspended during the quarantine period if other arrangements cannot be made for worship leadership.
    - i. If the pastor is fully vaccinated the quarantine period does not apply, unless the pastor is showing symptoms, per CDC guidance.
- 8. Miscellaneous Protocols
  - a. The church leadership will continue to monitor attendance and compliance with these COVID protocols and will suggest any necessary revisions.
  - b. St. Mary's Legacy Clinic will continue to operate following their COVID procedures.

## **Additional of Guidelines**

### **Funerals**

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

### **Weddings**

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