

**Community United Methodist Church  
In-Person, Outdoor Worship Service:**

Requirements for Safe Outdoor Worship  
during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Created by the CUMC Homecoming Committee

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**Community**  
a United Methodist Church

# Table of Contents

A Quick Look at Outdoor Worship.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Objective.....	4
The Survey.....	4
General Guidelines.....	5
Sanitation.....	7
Number of Services.....	8
Regarding Congregants and COVID-19.....	8
Mask Usage.....	8
Offering/Attendance.....	9
Communion.....	9
Baptisms.....	10
Bulletins.....	10
Enforcement.....	10
General Logistics Before Outdoor Worship.....	11
After Outdoor Worship.....	12

*The points below serve as a quick reference guide for your convenience. They are expanded upon in the remaining pages of this safety guide. Please read this document in its entirety.*

## **A Quick Look at Outdoor Worship**

1. Our main goal is to gather for worship in a safe and welcoming environment.
2. Until otherwise determined, there will be no Sunday School, Nursery, or Children's Church.
3. Plan to arrive 15 minutes prior to service start time. We want to allow ample time for the hosts to utilize their check in procedure and help everyone find a seat.
4. Wooden benches will be available for your use. Hosts will direct you to where to sit to ensure proper social distancing. If you would like to use a seat cushion or other covering please bring it. If you would like to use your own lawn chair you will be directed where to sit by our hosts.
5. You must properly wear a mask covering your nose and mouth before, during and after the service while on Church property.
6. Practice social distancing. Family units or your relational bubble should sit together, with at least 6ft. (the length of 4 chairs) between each family unit/relational bubble. Hosts will confirm safe seating distances.
7. The Church building is only open for bathroom use on the lower level. The multi-ministry building will not be available for use. Additionally, due to sanitation concerns the playground is off-limits.
8. If any of the following situations apply to you or someone you live with within the last 10 days, please watch the online service and we ask that you not come to Church until several days have passed and/or you get tested and are negative.

You are encouraged to seek medical attention as necessary:

- Traveled internationally
- Recently returned from out of state travel (excluding Washington DC or Virginia)
- Had close personal contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with a confirmed COVID-19 case
- Experienced flu like symptoms such as fever (100.4 or higher), cough, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, new-onset difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose

*\*Anyone who has a known exposure to another individual positive for COVID-19 should stay away from church (including ministry service) for two weeks unless they test negative. This does not apply to healthcare workers who as a part of their role experience COVID-19 exposures and are trained in proper use of PPEs.*

*While these guidelines may appear to be overwhelming, please give them careful attention as they are intended to provide you and your neighbor a safe place to worship.*

## **Introduction**

CUMC's Homecoming Committee under the leadership of Russ Flowers was tasked with looking at ways to bring members of the CUMC faith community back together in a safe manner during the COVID-19 pandemic. After review of much information, including a church survey and review of the US Center for Disease Control (US CDC) guidelines, the committee determined that an option for folks to gather safely in an outdoor setting could be provided. To facilitate this option, the Homecoming Committee determined a protocol would be needed. Leveraging work done by others, this document was adapted from the Back to Church policy created by members of the Severn Run Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SREPC) Safety Committee. The CUMC Administrative Council supports our efforts to provide a safe outdoor worship option.

## **Objective**

The purpose of this document is to communicate requirements for a safe and effective reopening of the CUMC property for congregational worship, while reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These requirements will remain in place until further notice.

## **The Survey**

- In May 2020, the Congregational Care Committee conducted an informal survey to gauge the readiness of the CUMC congregation to gather for worship. The overwhelming majority (85%) said they would continue to use online worship even if an in-person worship experience was provided. However, a significant number of people (68%) were interested in an outdoor worship experience. An in-car worship service appealed to 43% of the respondents and only a third (34%) of those responding said they want to attend indoor worship ASAP.

- Given the results of the survey amidst the continued risk for transmission of COVID-19, the Homecoming Committee supports an outdoor worship option with strict compliance of the safety measures described in this Back to Church policy.

## **General Guidelines**

- The Church building will be accessible to the pastor, staff and volunteers directly involved in the execution of the outdoor service. It will also be available for emergency bathroom needs on the lower level if necessary. Only one family unit should be in the bathroom at one time. Masks are to be properly worn covering the nose and mouth and social distancing measures are to be practiced at all times.
- There is a designated separate entrance and exit to the outdoor worship area. In order to accommodate those with special needs a handicap accessible walkway is available. The hosts will direct congregants upon entering and exiting.
- Attendance will initially be limited to roughly 25 family units in order for us to execute the rules and ensure a safe experience for those attending. After the first week, we anticipate being able to grow to approximately 25% of the outdoor capacity. All those (including children) wishing to attend the outdoor worship will be required to register in advance, providing contact information that will be used in the event of a possible COVID-19 exposure. Hosts will check to ensure only those who have pre-registered attend the service. Sign up Genius will be available to register via Realm and other CUMC communications. You may also contact Marissa at the church office during regular office hours. She may be able to assist

you with registration. Once we reach our limited capacity, we regrettably will not be able to accept additional attendees that week.

- On a case by case basis there may be the ability to allow people to attend a worship service who haven't pre-registered. In the event this is possible, they must provide required information to the host before entering the worship area. Please note this should be the exception rather than a reoccurring practice as it could be disruptive to the worship service. We ask for grace as we work toward a successful outdoor service.
- Congregants should bring their own bibles if desired.
- All water fountains will not be available to use, so congregants should plan ahead and bring water if they believe they will need it for personal use.
- Sunday School, Children's Church, and Nursery are temporarily not available.
- All congregants will practice social distancing with anyone outside of their family unit or relational bubble *even if they have gathered together in the past.* We do not want to give the impression of improper social distancing while gathering.
- All congregants will wear masks covering the nose and mouth while on the Church property. Those leading the worship service (band, liturgists, pastor) will not be required to wear a face mask while actively participating in the service as allowed by governmental guidance, recommendations, mandates, etc. The distance between those leading the service by singing will be approximately 27 feet. The distance between the Pastor and the congregants will be approximately 15 feet, which far exceeds the US CDC guidelines for outdoor gatherings.

- Singing will be limited to those leading the service. Congregants must refrain from singing out loud however people are encouraged to hum, clap and worship freely as the Spirit moves you.
- To help protect the health of the congregants and worship leaders, spacing of the seating (wooden benches) exceeds the US CDC guidelines. The benches are placed 7 feet apart and should not be moved.
- Each head of household will be responsible for ensuring that their entire family (including children) sit together and practice social distancing with people outside of their family unit or relational bubble. Hosts will remind congregants of the need to socially distance as necessary. This will assist in avoiding uncomfortable conflict during worship.
- Congregants may bring their own lawn-style chairs. Hosts will direct them to the designated seating area.

## **Sanitation**

- All products used to clean and sanitize, are in compliance with US CDC Guidelines. Additionally, any individual who is tasked with the cleaning and sanitizing will wear their own proper personal protective equipment as noted in the US CDC Guidelines.
- While the building will not be used for outside worship, it will be professionally cleaned each week to ensure safety among all users.

## **Number of Services**

- We believe we can safely meet with one outdoor service per week.
- The prerecorded online service will continue to be available.
- The Pastor is responsible for making the determination in regard to cancelling the outdoor service due to inclement weather. At a minimum, this information will be posted on the CUMC website, Realm, and when possible via email communication with as much notice as possible.

## **Regarding Congregants and COVID-19**

- It is a congregant's responsibility to determine if they or a family member show signs of COVID-19 before attending an outdoor service. We ask that anyone with a fever (over 100.4) or showing other signs of being sick, remain at home, seek medical attention according to US CDC Guidelines.
- If a congregant has contracted COVID-19, the church officers should be informed as soon as possible so that:
  - The church may be praying for that individual/family.
  - The congregation can be informed of any potential COVID-19 contact.

## **Mask Usage**

- CUMC is erring on the side of caution to protect our Church family by requiring the proper use of face masks covering both the nose and mouth while on Church property. While we believe we will be able to minimize the risk of COVID-19 community spread by socially distancing in the outdoor setting, much is still unknown about the virus as it relates to the risk of airborne transmission. Using the US CDC guidelines as a basis, we are strengthening the guidance and requiring,

rather than simply encouraging, the use of face masks while on Church property. The US CDC Guidelines (edited in parenthesis for CUMC purposes) are as follows: *Encourage (require) the use of cloth face coverings among staff and congregants. Face coverings are most essential when social distancing is difficult. Note: Cloth face coverings should not be placed on children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance. Cloth face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.*

## **Offering/Attendance**

- We will suspend the use of paper Connect cards and will continue to use Realm to collect attendance and prayer requests.
- Those wishing to give an offering are encouraged to use Realm or other electronic means for giving. Checks may also be mailed to the church office. The collection plate will not be passed during the service.

## **Communion**

- Traditional Communion elements (e.g., by Intinction) will not be offered at the outdoor worship service.
- At the discretion of the Pastor, the Sacrament of Communion may be observed in non-traditional ways that may consist of prepackaged, sealed elements which congregants may partake of during the service or at home following the service.

## Baptisms

- Will be planned and arranged with the family on an individual basis.

## Bulletins

- Paper bulletins will not be used during the outdoor service.
- Refer to the information available in the online worship link.

## Enforcement

- Pastor Stan will remind congregants to practice social distancing, and to keep in mind the safety and wellbeing of their fellow neighbor by properly wearing a face mask while on Church property.
- All congregants will practice social distancing with anyone outside of their family unit or relational bubble *even if they have gathered together in the past*. We do not want to give the illusion of improper social distancing while gathering.
- Anyone who **refuses** to follow the rules will be asked by a host or other designee to leave the property and will be encouraged to join worship using our online option. They will be denied registration for a future worship service unless they agree to comply with the rules.
- Each head of household will be responsible for ensuring that their entire family/ relational bubble (including children) practices social distancing and proper mask wearing. This will assist in avoiding uncomfortable conflict during worship.

## General Logistics Before Outdoor Worship

- The playground is closed. Parents, please make sure your children do not use it.
- Upon entering the outdoor worship area everyone must check in with the host for further direction. Hosts will confirm pre-registration, direct attendees where to sit depending on family size and address any special needs.
- Hosts will ensure only those who have pre-registered are allowed to attend.
- NOTE: In the unexpected event that an additional family guest or a new Visitor from the community who was not pre-registered arrives, they may be allowed to enter the worship area if: 1) they complete a registration form (consisting of contact information and health screening questions; 2) read and agree to follow the safe worship policies and protocols; and, 3) there is sufficient safe seating space remaining in the outdoor worship area. (Visitors will be provided information on pre-registration procedures for future services)
- There will be designated spaces for congregants in need of assistance.
- Families that bring their own lawn chairs will be shown by a host where they can be placed.
- Family units/relational bubbles are expected to sit together. Hosts will ensure that each family unit or individual will maintain 6 ft. between them. Excess chairs may be removed as needed.
- Congregants may bring an umbrella in case of unexpected rain showers.

## **After Outdoor Worship**

- At the end of the service congregants will leave the worship space using the designed and marked exit path.
- If you chose to socialize after the worship service please do so after leaving the worship area, remember to practice proper social distancing and continue to wear your face mask while on church property.
- Once the worship area is clear, the clean-up committee will clean (as appropriate) and return items used for worship to their storage place.
- The band members/musicians are responsible for the sanitation and break down of their equipment.
- The CUMC Homecoming committee will revise these requirements when needed and in compliance with Local, State and Federal Government laws/orders/mandates.