

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

These last four months have been some of the most difficult and certainly the strangest of my time in ministry. We have witnessed everything from a global pandemic that shut down schools and businesses to racial justice movements sweeping our nation, to the typical mountains and valleys that many of us experience in “normal life.” Not being able to gather with our church family has been excruciating, as we miss worshiping the God of all creation with one heart and voice.

But, the time is coming when we will be able to gather again, and it is coming soon. For the past 8 weeks, a group of clergy, staff, and laity have been working together as a Strategic Re-Opening Task Force, to develop a safe and effective plan for us to worship together again, and begin some of our regular activities. The plan, after much prayer and preparation, is ready to be tested. For two weeks, June 28 and July 5, Staff and Strategic Task Force members will implement the plan, test its effectiveness, and make sure it is the best plan for us to re-open. If, at the end of that trial period, the Clergy and Lay leadership of the church feel that it is safe for us to return, we will do so beginning July 12.

We are incredibly excited about this development, but are constantly monitoring the COVID-19 cases in our state and particularly in our area. If at any time between now and then we feel as though re-opening would not be safe for our Church Family, we will communicate that information and delay further. We will continue to live-stream our worship services.

I want to share with you what the guidelines will be for worship when we return and how they will impact our time together on campus. Please know that these guidelines are for the health and safety of all.

- We will offer three services, 8:00, 9:00, and 11:00. All limited to 50 people per service
- 8 AM in the Sanctuary for those 65 and older or those at risk. This will not be live-streamed. Encore Ministries will assist those members in signing up for service times
- 9 AM in the CLC. This will be live-streamed
- 11 AM in the Sanctuary. This will be live-streamed

I. **Benton FUMC Worship Guidelines**

II. **Physical distancing**

- a. Masks must be worn at all times by anyone over 10 years of age.
- b. A minimum of six feet social distancing will be strictly enforced in all in-person church activities, except for family groups.
- c. Handshakes and hugs are not allowed. We will encourage participants to find other ways to greet people, such as air high fives, waves, peace signs, etc. Meet and greet times will be moved outside and will involve at least six feet of social distancing.
- d. Clergy, staff and laity in leadership positions will wear masks.
- e. Lines for entry/exit will be monitored at all times for proper social distancing.
- f. We will continue online streaming of worship and other events.

III. **Sanitation**

- a. Hand sanitizing stations will be at every entrance.
- b. All surfaces will be wiped down, including door handles, classrooms, common areas, restrooms, pews, keyboards, tech equipment, etc.
- c. We have removed items that could be touched by multiple people such as pens, Hymnals, Bibles, information cards, etc.
- d. We have provided adequate supplies for healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, tissues and no-touch trash cans to everyone.
- e. We will disinfect church offices every day.
- f. Masks will be provided for those who need them.

- g. We will take temperature readings of everyone coming in or out of the church building with our new touch-less thermometers.
 - h. Areas where people gather and/or physical interaction is necessary, such as a coffee/snack bar will be temporary eliminated.
 - i. We will ensure that ventilation systems are working properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible.
 - j. Community water fountains will be inaccessible, though we will provide a bottled water station.
- IV. **Signage**
- a. Signs will be clearly posted at every entry advising that people should not enter the building if they have had recent fever, symptoms or contact with patients who have tested positively for COVID-19.
- V. **In-Worship Guidelines**
- a. Strict physical distancing guidelines of at least 6 feet of distance between everyone must be followed at all times. We will space seating for those who do not live in the same household to at least 6 feet. We will mark off pews and chairs to limit the number of people who are able to worship in-person.
 - b. In order to keep congregation size to 50 and under for each service, we will take reservations online for all three services. You must sign up by Wednesday each week, to allow staff to prepare worship spaces for the congregants who have registered. The link to sign up will be sent out by e-mail and posted on our website and Facebook Page.
 - c. In order to minimize close physical proximity, Congregants will be directed to their assigned seating areas. At the conclusion of the service, each row will be dismissed individually.
 - d. When a worship leader or pastor is speaking or singing, he or she does not have to wear a mask, but must maintain a distance of 12 feet. Onstage bands must be spaced accordingly. No choirs or congregational singing are allowed at this time.
 - e. For our multiple services, congregants arriving for the next service will be asked to remain in their cars until the previous attendees have left the facility and the sanctuary has been sanitized.
 - f. The Sacrament of Holy Communion will be served in ways that are safe in the pews.
 - g. The Offering will be received in a safe manner. Through online giving, a stationary giving box, and postal mail.
 - h. The Worship Spaces will be sanitized after each use.
 - i. All indoor in-person gatherings (weddings, funerals, support groups, etc.) will fall under the same guidelines as for worship

I know that these guidelines can seem restricting at first, but for us to worship safely, I feel that they are crucial for us all to follow. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable returning to worship at this time, please stay home. We do not want to put any of you at risk. This plan was prayed over, and we trust that God has led us in our decision. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are here for you.

We love you and we miss you. We are excited for what the future holds and know that God will be with us and unite us until we meet again.

Grace and Peace,
 Rev. Ben Crismon
 Rev. Taylor Loy
 Rev. Garry Teeter
 Strategic Re-Opening Taskforce Members