



Grand Avenue United Methodist Church Covid-19 Response – Reopening Guidelines

In response to both the guidance and directives set forth by our Arkansas Annual Conference, CDC guidelines, the Arkansas Department of Health, and continued guidance from the Bishop’s task force concerning the Safe Reopening of churches in response to Covid-19, the GAUMC Covid Task Force adopts and further recommends the following guidelines and directives for the safe reopening of Grand Avenue United Methodist Church.

GAUMC COVID-19 Taskforce In-Person Gathering Proposal

With the critical factors below as a reference, it is our recommendation that GAUMC follow the guidelines as set forth by the Arkansas Conference found at <https://arumc.org/covid19/dashboard/>

The criteria to consider for the reopening of in-person worship is based on two components of Arkansas county infection rates using the two benchmarks below:

1. In-person gatherings and worship are not recommended if the “cases per 100k” benchmark is above 75

OR

2. If the cases per 100k is above 25 per 100k **AND** the “positive test rate” benchmark is above 10 percent

Note: This data for this criteria is provided by <https://covidactnow.org>

Once we experience a **downward trend in these benchmarks for no less than 14 days and reach either of the necessary benchmarks recommended for safe re-entry**, it is our recommendation that we resume in-person worship at Grand Avenue UMC.

In the event that we experience an upward trend for no less than 14 days of numbers exceeding either benchmark, it is our recommendation that we return to parking lot and virtual only until the above criteria for safe re-entry is met again.

- The Board of Trustees of Grand Avenue UMC must approve all plans related to addressing Covid-19. In addition, we are required to keep our District Superintendent apprised of these approved plans and of any instances of Covid-19.

Part 1: Rationale

Our Christian Responsibility

When and how churches reopen is not primarily an issue of religious freedom or personal rights. It is a matter of love for God and neighbor. John Wesley's first General Rule, "Do no harm" compels those of us who are Jesus' disciples shaped by the Wesleyan perspective to make sure that our personal actions do not harm others, even if we are not intentionally doing so. This means that we need to exhibit abundant caution and, for the foreseeable future, act as if we could infect those with whom we come into contact.

People trust their church, pastor, and leaders. Therefore, it is incumbent that leaders act with common sense, wisdom, and constant evaluation to make the right decision at the right time, especially since many participants are in an at-risk population.

Our Guiding Principles

- 1) **Do No Harm** — The intention of the church, both lay and clergy, is to cause no harm to any individual or group in the church. This may mean that individual preferences and historical precedence may not have priority over the health of all in the community. Protecting individuals who are at-risk is of the utmost importance in all planning for re-launching.
- 2) **Adherence to guidance from the Arkansas Conference** of the United Methodist Church will be a priority in all planning.
- 3) **State and local guidance** will be utilized in all planning.
- 4) **We are the Church** — God is not limited by buildings or sanctuaries. The Holy Spirit is active everywhere. Christ's church is alive in all elements of our life and we as Christ followers can live out our faith in our daily lives, including worship services that are non-traditional and entirely new. In short, "Church" can never be "cancelled" because *we are the Church!*

State of Arkansas Guidance

Governor Hutchinson provided guidance effective May 4, 2020, concerning the safe reopening of in-person church activities. The Governor stressed that this is guidance and not a directive in order to respect the First Amendment to the Constitution. However, it is essential to note that the directives he has issued so far for various industry groups place very strict limitations on the number of people who can gather and how they may gather.

Churches vary greatly in size and complexity. There is no "one size fits all" plan for everyone. Smaller faith communities with limited activities may fully reopen sooner than larger faith communities that may take several months and involve both in-person and online activities. Faith communities in urban areas may take longer than those in sparsely populated communities. Some faith communities may reopen, only to have to scale back because of a surge in coronavirus cases in their community. Once clearance is given to re-engage, most congregations will not be ready to immediately return to being fully open. It will occur in stages; starting with smaller gatherings, then proceeding to medium gatherings and, finally, to larger gatherings.

Regardless of the size of the gatherings, it's essential that appropriate safeguards such as social distancing, PPE and sanitizing be in place. If they cannot, it is not yet time to re-engage. Additionally, if there is a resurgence of COVID-19 in the state, or if there are cases in an individual congregation, activities will need to be immediately suspended until it is safe again.

Part 2: Critical Reopening Factors

The safe reopening of churches will involve five interactive elements in the coming weeks or months:

1. Strictly following guidelines from the [CDC](#) and [the Arkansas Department of Health](#)
2. Appropriate social distancing and sanitizing
3. Cooperation from individuals who are symptomatic or in an at-risk population
4. Awareness of the unique characteristics of the church's context
5. Constant evaluation of available medical data

Federal Guidelines

The federal government has recently [released guidelines](#) for the reopening of the American economy in three distinct stages. For each stage to take place, certain criteria must be first met by state and regional governments. These criteria include:

1. Symptoms

- Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses (ILI) reported within a 14-day period
AND
- Downward trajectory of Covid-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period

2. Cases

- Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period
OR
- Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)

3. Hospitals

- Hospitals can treat all patients without crisis care
AND
- Robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing

Church Reopening Guidelines

The safe reopening of churches will involve three stages and each stage will commence when appropriate medical guidance indicates it is safe to do so. Below are the bishop's guidelines:

- **Stage 1:** Activities involving groups smaller than 10 if appropriate safety measures are undertaken, including social distancing and sanitation. This will allow for small gatherings, Bible Study and accountability groups, and worship in small congregations. It does not, however, authorize church childcare, children, or youth activities.
- **Stage 2:** Activities involving groups smaller than 50 if recommended safety measures are utilized.
- **Stage 2.5:** Number of persons is based on square footage of available seating in occupied room, with minimum of 36 sq. ft. "bubbles" for all persons. Gathering limited to 45 minutes with all CDC guidelines followed. <https://arumc.org/covid19/safe-church-reopening-guidance/>
- **Stage 3:** Activities involving larger groups. Although this stage allows for much greater flexibility, it will be essential to continue to practice safe and responsible gatherings.

Part 3: HOW TO SAFELY REOPEN

In September 2020, the GAUMC Church Council met and set into motion the guidelines we are to follow for meeting safely. This outline will include their guidelines and further expand on any details that may not have been included.

ENTRY TO THE BUILDING

Signs will be posted at both approved entrances.



PUBLIC HEALTH NOTICE

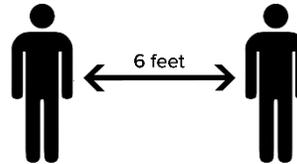
DO NOT ENTER THIS BUILDING IF YOU ARE SICK.

ALL VISITORS, PLEASE:

- Clean your hands after arriving and before leaving.
- Always cover your cough.
- Use a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Wear a facemask.



SOCIAL DISTANCING



Keep a 6-foot distance between yourself and others.



Stop the Spread of COVID-19



Do NOT enter if you:

- Have had fever of 100.4°F or greater in the last 2 days
- Have a cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell
- Have had contact with a person known to be infected with COVID-19 in the previous 14 days.

To protect vulnerable people from COVID-19, ADH discourages you from entering if you:

- Are aged 65 or older
- Have chronic health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, lung disease and others
- Have a compromised immune system



Until further notice Grand Avenue United Methodist Church will use two entrances into the building on Sunday mornings: Attendees will enter the Sanctuary through the entrance into the Narthex at the front of the Sanctuary and for those that require handicap accessible entrance, the parlor entrance south of the sanctuary may be used.

The bathrooms in the parlor area adjacent to the Sanctuary will be available for use but their use is discouraged unless absolutely necessary. Please limit access to one person at a time.

HAND SANITIZER will be placed at entrance doors. Attendees may use this or their own personal hand sanitizer after entering the building and before touching anything else.

MASKS must be worn by all attendees 10 years and up and are optional for those between 2 and 10. Paper masks will be available, but attendees should bring their own masks if possible because we have a limited supply of the paper ones.

Masks will be worn while inside the building. Those leading worship may remove their masks when singing a solo or reading, speaking, and preaching. When not wearing a mask, these people must be at least 12 feet from the next nearest person. Family groups may be closer. (For the purpose of this document a family group is those who live in the same household and those family and friends who have chosen to be in the same “bubble”.)

Masks may also be removed when consuming the communion elements. **(See the section on Holy Communion for more information.)**

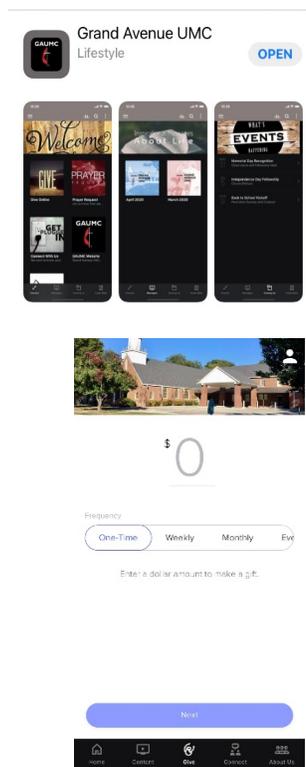
GREETERS will be taking temperatures at the Narthex entrance. Greeters will also distribute masks and aid in the dispensing of hand sanitizer when necessary. Those who enter through the handicap entrance will need to be checked at their seats or upon entering, if possible.

HOLY COMMUNION: Attendees will remain seated during Holy Communion. Individual bags containing the appropriate number of prepackaged elements will be available upon entering. The bags will be assembled by people who are wearing masks and gloves and have not presented any Covid symptoms or have a recent history of contact with a Covid positive person.

OFFERING PLATES will not be passed but will be placed at the entrances to the sanctuary. Please place your tithes and offerings in the plate when you enter or exit. You may also continue to mail in your tithes and offerings or use our GAUMC APP’s pay option.

For online payment:

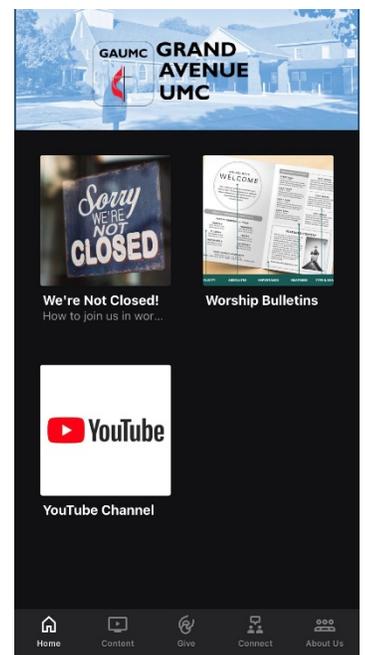
1. **Simply download the APP**
OR
go to www.grandavenueumc.org/give



2. **Upon entering the APP, choose the “give” button at the bottom of the page.**

3. **Enter the amount and frequency and hit NEXT.**

- The APP will guide you step by step on your payment.



HYMNALS and BIBLES These have been removed from the pews. You are encouraged to bring your own Bible. Scripture readings and Hymn lyrics will be on the video slides so that you can follow along. Attendance will be taken as people enter the building. This is for our records and possible contact tracing. Contact information will be collected from guests.

AUDIO/VISUAL:

Due to the fact that the people at the sound booth are in close proximity to each other and the equipment cannot be easily disinfected, the operators for the time being will be limited to 2 people. Anyone entering the balcony area must be seated at least 6 ft away. Masks must be worn at all times.

RECORDING & STREAMING:

For those unable to attend in-person worship or prefer to follow our service online, we will continue to offer a recorded or live-streamed service uploaded to our YouTube page which you can access by searching for "Grand Avenue UMC - Stuttgart, AR" on YouTube, downloading our APP, or by various links on Facebook.

OTHER COMPONENTS OF WORSHIP:

-While In-person worship may have resumed we will continue to offer the worship service to those who prefer to attend in the parking lot in the safety of their vehicles by tuning in to FM 88.5. Those attending in the parking lot will receive bulletins that will include song lyrics as well as the elements of communion when the occasion arises.

-During this period of transition there will be no children acolytes, and no in-person children's sermon, however we invite other ways to engage students during worship and are working to include those on visual screens.

-Solos or songs by family groups are permitted.

-Singers and speakers must be 12 feet from the nearest person when not masked.

-Congregational singing is allowed with masks.

-There will be no choir during this period.

-Worship will be shortened to limit the duration of possible exposure.

WHERE TO SIT:

-For our convenience pews have been marked to allow for appropriate distancing. We ask that you respect these measures and please allow distance from the aisle area. Families groups may sit together in a pew. Again, for the purpose of this document a family group is those who live in the same household and those family and friends who have chosen to be in the same "bubble".

-Groups must sit 6 feet apart.

-We respectfully request that once seated, no one move about to visit prior to the service.

DISMISSAL:

To avoid congestion in the aisles, ushers will dismiss one pew at a time, waiting for those to exit the building before dismissing the next pew. Worshippers will exit through the same door they entered.

CLEANING:

Surfaces will be cleaned with approved disinfectant between events.

OUTSIDE GROUPS/FUNERALS, ETC.:

All attendees of all events held inside the building will abide by the safety and distancing guidelines.

GROUP OR COMMITTEE MEETINGS: In-person and group or committee meetings may resume at this time in the Fellowship Hall or Sanctuary only, as they allow adequate space for safe attendance. Entrance to the building for these occasions may be accessed through the Fellowship Hall door. **ALL ACTIVITIES CONCERNING USE OF THE BUILDING MUST GIVE ADEQUATE NOTICE AND BE APPROVED THROUGH THE CHURCH OFFICE.** This is to ensure that the cleaning staff have adequate time to sanitize the area both before and after these activities. All other in-person requirements with regard to Covid-19 must be followed.

YOUTH, TWEEN, AND CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES: Scheduled activities may resume with limited numbers and by strictly following safe sanctuary rules. During this limited phase, no buffet or open meal containers may be served. Snacks and drinks prepackaged may be served. All other rules concerning entrance, sign-in, masks and facility use must be observed. Any changes that occur must be notified and approved by the church office.

GOING FORWARD:

This document contains protocol and procedures for Stage 2.5.

These will remain in effect until further notice. All cleaning and safety precautions will continue in Stage 3. The number of people allowed to meet together in stage 3 will be determined by the size and layout of the building.

This policy may be revised at any time.

The Boards of Trustees may make **more restrictive** provisions without contacting the Southeast District but loosening of procedures must be approved by the District Superintendent before they can be implemented.

In the event that an attendee tests positive, they will immediately inform the pastor and all activities will cease until the proper safety measures can be taken. (cleaning, contact tracing, quarantining, etc.)

In the event that an attendee discovers they have been in the chain of a possible infection, they will refrain from attending any events for the ADH advised quarantine period. If they have attended an event in between their contact with that person and finding out they are possibly infected, they will notify the pastor so that appropriate cleaning may occur.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Taylor Loy, Cell # (501) 732-9182 or by calling the church office at (870) 673-6317.