

# Wisconsin Annual Conference Guideline for Reopening Our Buildings

## Theological Foundations:

United Methodist Christians affirm that we follow Jesus and express our love for God by loving others, including neighbors, strangers as well as the members who have faithfully served in our churches. As a connectional body we recognize that our actions affect others. United Methodists have a long history of caring for the whole person, including the health of body mind spirit. In the interest of expressing our theology in our actions we strive to do no harm while opening our buildings in the midst of a global pandemic. In opening our buildings, we strive to focus on the faith that unites us rather than political and social views that might divide us. We are aware that our state is a large one and that we serve in varied contexts with different needs, resources and sensibilities.

## Planning:

Communicate to members and regular attendees of your services that adjustments will be required before reopening your building. (Last in-first out seating, physical distancing, no singing, no passing of the Peace, offering plates, Communion trays, attendance pads, etc. Prepare for the possibility of seasons of opening and closing over the next year or more depending on the trajectory of the illness in your area and the availability of a vaccine.

Look for a claim the blessings of our changed circumstances as well as making space to grieve what is lost.

Assign responsibility to monitoring and incorporating Conference Guidance and establish a means for communicating this information to people with a need to know.

Assign responsibility for coordinating with your local health and law enforcement authorities and establish a means for communicating this information to people with a need to know.

Check with our insurer, Church Mutual regarding any needed risk-assessment. Church Mutual has a number online resources available to you without cost. [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com)

Require and provide masks to be worn while in personal contact with others (ushers, greeters, etc).

Establish protocols for physical distancing before, during and after in-building services. Assign and train the individuals who will be responsible (probably ushers and greeters) in guiding attendees in these practices. Post the protocols where they can be seen throughout your building. (See recommended protocols)

Continue offering online options if possible, for those who are sick at higher risk or under quarantine.

Develop isolation protocols should anyone become ill while in your building(s).

Review your building prior to re-opening.

Make sure you have adequate masks and sanitizing supplies on hand before opening your building(s).

## Recommended Worship Protocols

1. SEATING: LIFO – “last in first out” ushered seating – seat people arriving first in the front row. Seat people not living together at least six feet apart. This will probably be every other row with alternating end of the pews/seating). Maintain at least six feet of physical distance between people as they are seated and dismissed.
2. NO PASSING. Do not pass attendance pads, offering plates, the Peace, and determine alternate means

for collecting offering, attendance information and other information previously passed

3. REMOVE anything passed from or kept in the pews (bibles, hymnals, cards, pens, pencils, etc)
4. OFFERING should be either electronic (the Conference Treasurer can help you with this) or placed by the attendee in a plate.
5. ORDER OF WORSHIP. Where possible project the order of worship. If you need to use bulletins or announcement sheets, please have ushers direct attendees to a table where these can be picked up.
6. HAND SANITIZER in all high touch areas.
7. NO SHARING. Do not share equip that is touched such as microphones. Each worship leader should have their own space so that pulpits and lecterns are not shared without sanitizing in between uses.
8. BIBLES. Encourage people to bring their own bible or print scriptures on paper. If you use the lectionary consider purchasing preprinted scripture sheets. Scripture can also be downloaded in many versions and languages from various bible websites.
9. BLOCK: block off areas not being used.
10. TIGHT SPACES Establish one in-one out protocols for tight spaces and have sanitizer available if it includes high touch surfaces.
11. RESTROOMS. Develop a means appropriate to your space to ensure restrooms are sanitized between uses. This may include wipes at the entrance and within the restroom so that people can sanitize as they use.
12. FLOW. Where possible have people enter and exit through separate doors to reduce close contact in passageways.
13. ADMISSION. Establish self-screening admission criteria. (See Admission Checklist)
14. CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY. Postpone in-person children's activities such as vacation bible school, mission trips and other close contact activities unless you are able to offer them with additional safety measures such as physical distancing, prepackaged served (not self-service) snacks and meals. Consider virtual activities such as recorded bedtime bible stories offered by church members. Local mission trips with physical distancing where youth do not travel together might be possible (Daily drive-in). Disable or block the use of any playground equipment.

## **Building**

1. Establish an initial and weekly walkthrough of your building(s) to ensure that they are safe and clean before opening.
2. Care for regular maintenance issues as well anything that might have been delayed during the period the building was closed.
3. Post your safety measures and directional signs, especially if these are changes from previous habits and patterns.