

Wisconsin Annual Conference Response Guidelines to COVID-19

May 7, 2020

Dear Wisconsin United Methodists:

These are indeed difficult times for us. It is difficult to keep up with the many changes and challenges we face each day. Beyond the “when” we anticipate that you seek guidance with the “How” to reopen your buildings in ways that are safe, faithful and legal. Our Task Team offers the following as we strive to serve God and neighbor as faithful United Methodists. We know that our work is imperfect and incomplete, but we pray that it will guide you and give you hope as you serve in the context where you are called as you prepare for the future. It is possible that we may be opening and closing and reopening in the days ahead as waves of contagion hit our communities.

We will strive to update you as conditions change as they surely will!

With gratitude,

Bishop Jung’s COVID-19 Task Team

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*Lay team members names are in **bold print**.*

Preamble

1. United Methodists root their faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ and in the Great Commandment, to love God and to love one another.
2. We express our faith as connectional church. This means that we understand that our actions affect others; that we are all in this together and that each should contribute and receive according to their gifts and their needs.
3. United Methodists are practical people with a deep interest in health from our earliest days. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, published advice for good health and remedies for ailments in 1747 known as *Primitive Physic or an Easy and Natural Method of CURING most DISEASES*. Through our General Board of Global Missions Health Initiatives, we continue this tradition as an expression of our faith to this day.
4. Wisconsin United Methodists live, work and worship in diverse contexts. There is no “one size fits all” approach that is practical and just in every setting. Nonetheless, guidelines rooted in our faith, identity, and in the best science available to us are offered here for your use. They are intended to support United Methodist Churches in Wisconsin as we strive to do the will of God and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Guiding Principles

1. United Methodist Churches of the Wisconsin Annual Conference work together with local health officials and local law enforcement to ensure that their practices are both safe and legal in their context.
2. United Methodist Churches of the Wisconsin Annual Conference consult with Church Mutual, our liability insurance carrier, to minimize risk and assure insurance coverage for their actions, especially as we begin to reopen church buildings for worship and other physically interactive human missions of the church.

3. United Methodist Churches of the Wisconsin Annual Conference commit to do no harm to the best of our ability as we serve God and humanity.

General Recommendations for Church Offices in the Current Time

1. Stagger schedules as needed to ensure physical distancing and adequate disinfecting between use of facilities by staff and volunteers.
2. Use applicable church service recommendations (below) when several people are in the building simultaneously.

General Recommendations for Church Services when Worship in Person can Resume

(We also offer this information in a graphic form which you may post)

1. Hand sanitizer placed throughout the church at locations near items commonly touched. (This is a best practice even after the COVID-19 pandemic).
2. Masks (covering of the nose and mouth) are recommended for anyone able to wear one. If possible, disposable masks should be made available to those needing one.
3. Temperature Screening: You may choose to offer a no contact temperature screen upon entering the church. No one with a fever should knowingly enter the building.
4. There should be a masked and gloved restroom attendant to assure physical distancing and sanitization between each person using the facilities in larger restrooms. Smaller restrooms may require the availability of disinfectant wipes so individuals may wipe the facilities as they leave.
5. One way in-one way out. Traffic patterns should be established and clearly marked to assure doors are used only for entry or exit where practical. In “one door available/accessible” churches “a step aside and distance” protocol may be needed to assure physical distancing as people enter and leave the building.

6. The church should establish an isolation room or area in the event a person falls ill while in the church building where they can stay until they are able to leave.

Worship in person when safe

1. Worship in the main sanctuary should be limited to the number permitted by law and room capacity with appropriate distancing.
2. Upon entrance approval, ushers (wearing masks) will guide worshippers to seating at pre-established 6 ft. intervals with only people living together sitting together. For smaller churches, unrelated people will maintain 6 ft. distancing when they take their seats.
3. The first to arrive are seated in the front and working toward the back.
4. No passing:
 - Of the peace (no direct physical contact)
 - Of offering plates. Electronic offering is encouraged. Worshippers may place their offering in an offering plate upon entry or exit.
 - Of bulletins - please pre-distribute at seating places if you use them.
 - Of attendance pads, prayer cards, sign up-sheets. Use electronic/ telephonic means to care for these matters.
 - Of Communion elements. Communion should be pre-placed at pre-determined seats in pews. No sharing loaf or cup. Prepackaged elements placed by a person wearing a mask and gloves is recommended.
5. When the service is over people shall be dismissed back to front at 6 ft. intervals.
6. Physical distancing should be maintained as much as practical at all times on church property during the season of active Corona virus in Wisconsin.
7. Food and or beverage service at fellowship time is not recommended.
8. Choir and congregational singing are risky. If it is possible to do so safely, a solo or small group (appropriately distanced) might be used.
9. Children should not be called forward for a message unless distancing can be safely maintained
10. Removing bibles, hymnals, sign in pads, offering envelopes and printed materials from the pews is recommended. You may guide worship with projection and invite people to bring their own bibles or use a bible app on a smart phone.

Cleaning

Church building cleaning shall include disinfecting all areas used, especially if there is more than one worship service on a given day. The CDC recommendations are in the Resources section of this document. The virus probably cannot last a full week on surfaces so regular adequate cleaning may be sufficient where there is a single service or after the final service of the day.

Resources

WCC

1. Returning to Church. Wisconsin Council of Churches.

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>

CDC

1. Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
2. Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>

Other Annual Conferences

<https://www.iaumc.org/newsdetail/iowa-annual-conference-of-the-united-methodist-church-crisis-response-re-entry-plan-13653399>

<https://www.minnesotaumc.org/covid-19-preparedness>

Prepackaged Communion

<https://www.cokesbury.com/church-supplies-communion-supplies>