

## Returning to Worship Covenant

During our time of quarantine, one aspect of life that Americans miss most has been the ability to gather together in worship. For many, the act of coming together may be one of the most important ways to heal our souls. Indeed, the Book of Matthew tells us “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” Worship is comfort, praise and provides opportunity to be closer to God.

With the re-opening of Wisconsin, our bishop has indicated that congregations may once again consider holding in-person worship beginning June 21. With that date in mind, a small group of church members has begun developing a “Worship Covenant” to guide the **temporary** approach to worship services at the United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay.

The purpose of a Worship Covenant is to set out our mutual commitment—what our church will do to keep us healthy, and in return, what we are expected to do to help the church and show respect for the health of one another.

When we reopen for in person worship on June 21, this is what you can expect:

- **Arriving for worship—**
  - Sunday morning services will continue to be held at 9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Each service will last 40 minutes to allow time to sanitize the sanctuary before the next group enters.
  - Please use the main doors on Silver Spring Drive to enter the church. Separate doors will be used for entering and exiting to prevent people passing close to one another. This is a recommended practice for public buildings.
  - A sign on the entrance will ask that people do not enter if they are experiencing any of the symptoms of Covid-19 as outlined by the CDC.
  - Hand sanitizer will be offered to each person who enters.
  - Attendance is not to exceed 125 people in the sanctuary, 25 in the balcony, and 12 in the chancel, which is roughly 25% of capacity. Worshipers will be required to spread out in pews to allow at least six feet—side to side and front to back—for individuals or family groups.
  - People worshipping in person will be required to wear masks. If you don’t own a personal face mask, we have a limited supply that we can provide to individuals.
  - Staff and worship leaders will model this except when offering the sermon or musical number.
  
- **Music—**
  - Singing in a group has been identified by the CDC as a means for spreading virus droplets. This means the Chancel Choir will not lead music and the congregation will not sing hymns in the conventional way.

- **Offering and other worship components—**
  - To prevent the spread of germs, we will not pass collection plates. You may place your offering envelope in the offering box as you exit.
  - Communion will be served via individual pre-packaged communion kits. If you are uncomfortable worshipping in person, communion will continue to be offered 11:30-1:00 on our front sidewalk.
  - To prevent the spread of the virus on surfaces, there will be no hymnals or Bibles in the pew pockets.
  - We will continue the texting of prayer requests.
  - Each individual will receive an attendance card to be dropped in the offering box, not just for attendance records, but make sure we can do contact tracing. If someone tests positive at the service you attended, you will be notified.
  
- **Leaving worship—**
  - When the service ends, attendees will exit the sanctuary onto Silver Spring Drive through the northeast doors near the pulpit. This allows people to exit the building without passing close to worshippers arriving for the next service.
  - To maintain physical distancing, all fellowship will take place outside.
  - The sanctuary will be thoroughly sanitized following each service.
  - The CDC recommends that people minimize time spent indoors with others; therefore, we will not serve coffee in the narthex. It's best, for the time being, that we practice fellowship outdoors in front of the church, using social distance and continuing to wear masks out of concern for one another.
  - Although the restrooms will be sanitized regularly, we strongly encourage the use of your facilities at home.
  - All other programming will continue in current virtual format until further notice.

As we move through unprecedented times, **these temporary practices** are the best way to uphold our Covenant with one another. These new behaviors allow us to worship together while protecting one another from Covid-19. We recognize that many of these practices will feel unfamiliar, but we will learn as we go, and you can expect revisions as weeks go by. Our team will monitor effectiveness of the worship experience and keep an eye on the date that we can return to our normal practices.

If you're not ready to return to worship in person, no worries. We will continue online worship just as you've come to expect during quarantine. We look forward to welcoming you back for worship in person on Sunday, June 21. There will not be an 8:00 a.m. service at this time, but Saturday evening worship will return this fall.