

*The following info was submitted June 7, 2020, for publication in our July-August newsletter. Alterations to this info and subsequent phasing may be made if/when deemed necessary and/or appropriate.*

## RE-OPENING WELL AT WESTMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Westminster UMC has been the hands and feet of Jesus in new and innovative ways since the temporary closure of our campus on March 13th, 2020. We have adapted to worshipping online, and have observed the technology and participation improving each week. We've set up worship spaces in our homes and tuned into Zoom, Facebook or YouTube to fellowship with one another. We have been able to see our beautiful organist Peggy from a new perspective as she keeps playing week after week. We've sung along as all of our wonderful music staff led us with gusto, and we were in awe of an incredible virtual choir. We celebrated the Joys of Easter and Pentecost from the comfort and safety of our homes, often in our pajamas, coffee in hand and pets at our feet.

We have received email lessons from our Sunday School teachers, and Zoomed with Ms. Jacki for the children's sermon. We've been "dusted" with gifts and devotions from Malcolm and Jacki, John and Steph, and our Sunday School teachers. Our small groups and adult Sunday Schools have adapted to meeting online. The education committee has come together to figure out a new and exciting way to offer VBS virtually. Sherri and Belinda have continued to keep the administrative wheels turning. Our youth have met each week to share encouragement, play games and stay connected. The Cub Scouts continue to work on service projects and merit badges, and the preschool offered weekly lessons on YouTube.

We've continued to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and graduations with yard signs, drive-by parades and parking lot ceremonies. We've mourned deaths and celebrated lives, together in spirit and in heart.

We raised over \$1800 to support the Silver Oak Academy during their COVID-19 crisis. Our stalwart soup kitchen volunteers have continued to feed people every week without missing a beat. Several of our members have joined a new grassroots effort called Neighbors Nourishing Neighbors in order to combat ongoing food insecurity in our community. Pastor Ken, our VIP and LINKS teams have kept in tireless contact with those most vulnerable among us.

In short, we have demonstrated our resilience and steadfastness in the wake of massive closures, great uncertainty, and fears for our lives and health.

And yet, amidst the innovation and can-do spirit, we long to reclaim our physical space to come together in fellowship and worship as the body of Christ. As such, in line with recommendations from the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Pastor Malcolm has put together a Re-Entering Well Task Force comprised of church leaders and subject matter experts. This team, with approval from church council, is tasked with determining when and how the church building will

be reopening. The Task Force is using recommendations from state and local legislators, the CDC and the Local Health Department. Given the uniqueness of our congregation and campus, our process of re-opening will not directly mirror that of state and local governments.

We anticipate the life of the church to continue to be shaped, at least in part, by COVID-19 until the end of 2020, and most likely into 2021. We will be evaluating what worship, preschool, and overall building usage will look like for as long as necessary, while continuing to do our part as a faith community to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to care for each other and the community. The Re-Entering Well Task Force has put together a Phased Re-Opening Plan, which is outlined in the attached table. It is unlikely that our re-opening will move in a linear fashion from Safer At Home to Phase 3 in a neat and tidy progression, but will be a long process of opening, closing, evaluating and re-evaluating.

In addition, the Task Force put together the following guidelines once we begin to re-open the church campus:

### SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES FOR ENTERING THE CHURCH CAMPUS

- If you are experiencing a fever, cough or any other symptoms of illness, stay home.
- Virtual worship, meetings, fellowship and education will continue to be offered for anyone who prefers to continue staying at home.
- Initially, space will be limited to 60-75 worshipers depending on family size. We encourage you to RSVP for worship via the SignUpGenius email that will be forthcoming.
- You are encouraged to take your temperature at home prior to coming to the church campus. All staff and volunteers will have their temperatures taken when they arrive at church, prior to serving. If someone has an elevated temperature, they will be sent home.
- Social distancing of 6 or more feet will be practiced while on campus. The sanctuary and surrounding areas will be clearly marked to ensure social distancing during worship.
- Proper hand hygiene and mask-wearing is expected of anyone entering the building. If you are unable or unwilling to wear a mask, you will be asked to worship or gather virtually.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at all entry points and in strategic places throughout the open section of the building.
- Everyone is encouraged to bring their own masks. Cloth masks with the WUMC logo will be available for purchase. A limited number of disposable masks will be available for anyone who needs one.
- Only two entry-points will be unlocked for access to the building on Sunday mornings: the main front entrance and the entrance to the chapel. The chapel entrance should only be used by those with mobility issues. Trained greeters will be located at each entry to guide people to the sanctuary.

- There will be signage and barriers throughout the building limiting access. Access will be restricted to the sanctuary, the Narthex, the elevator, the stairwell bathrooms located as you exit the doors at the front of the sanctuary on the left, and adjacent hallways.
- The pews will be emptied of all items, including cushions and hymnals. If you prefer a cushion, please bring your own.
- We will be unable to sing corporately for the time being. The music staff and volunteers are reimagining what music in worship will look like.
- Parts of worship that typically include contact, such as passing of the peace, communion, and the offering, will be reimagined to be meaningful while also adhering to social distancing guidelines.
- There will be no fellowship or coffee time before or after the service.
- A process will be in place to sanitize the open section of the building following worship each week.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE ONGOING LIFE OF THE CHURCH

- VBS will be done virtually summer 2020
- Mission and ongoing service opportunities will remain local and follow CDC and state guidelines until it is determined safe to consider other options.
- The church office and youth house will be closed to all except staff until it is determined safe for others to enter and appropriate precautions are put in place.
- With the exception of Sunday worship, the main church building will be closed to all except staff until it is determined safe for others to enter and appropriate precautions are put in place.
- In the event we learn that someone in our congregation tests positive for COVID-19 and was in the church building, we will follow guidelines for informing public health entities.

Please refer to the Phased Re-Opening Well Table, pgs 8-9 of this newsletter, for more detailed information. If you have questions or concerns, please contact our team at [re-enteringwell@wumcmd.org](mailto:re-enteringwell@wumcmd.org).

Sincerely,

The Re-Entering Well Task Force