**First United Methodist Church Winnsboro**

***Guideline for Slow, Safe and Sacred Worship, Learning, Loving and Serving***

May 1, 2020

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” – Psalm 91:1-2*

What future we will find ourselves in depends not only on the behavior of the virus, but on the actions of people – as individuals, churches, communities, and governments. The way forward will not be a matter of following a timetable, but of faithfully discerning the signs of the times, and responding accordingly.

Please understand: it may be through the next ***year*** that our lives will be shaped by the timeline set by COVID-19 and we will face difficult choices between conflicting needs and necessities.  As a church, we must continue our efforts to contain the virus and prevent a new wave of infections and deaths as we do not want to do anything that will cause further damage or lose what we’ve gained from the sacrifices we’ve already made. We do not want to reopen our buildings and resume gatherings prematurely for fear of making *anyone* feel they need to choose between keeping themselves and others safe and participating in congregational life like others.

In developing our guidelines we have followed guidelines of Federal and State public health experts and church leaders of the North Texas Conference. Our primary responsibility is to make healthy and strong pastoral decisions, not as a fixed set of guidelines that will account for every circumstance, but as an adaptable plan to return to safe worship, learning, loving and serving. We recognize that most ministry is communal and community driven so we will always consider the needs of *this* congregation, our polity and theology, and local conditions.

The advice of public health officials may change as more becomes known about COVID-19 so we want to reiterate that we may move back and forth between phases of reopening if second or third waves of infections emerge.

*We pray for a spirit of discernment, for wisdom, and patience. We pray for researchers and medical professionals to find treatments and cures; for the ill and recovering; for those grieving and struggling with the losses and stress of these times; we pray for those struggling financially. We pray for those who do not know the love of Christ that they may find His love through us. AMEN*

***Signs will be posted indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they are feeling sick or are coughing/sneezing for any reason.***

**PHASE ONE: now through June 1 …** “that satisfy the gating criteria”\*

AT-RISK PEOPLE SHOULD STAY SAFE AT HOME: the Center for Disease Control (CDC) identifies vulnerable adults as those 65 years and older and/or with underlying conditions. [CLICK HERE](about:blank) for CDC details.

From now through June 1, the following will apply:

* As always, we will continue to provide online worship services
* Bible studies, small groups, etc. will be given opportunities to worship on ZOOM as long as necessary.
* Continue holding online worship services only.
* Continue Monday drive-through visitation.
* Bible studies, small groups and leadership teams can continue to meet online or, by maintaining 6’ social distancing and taking on the responsibility of disinfecting the room after they meet, they may reserve a meeting room during the week. Wearing face coverings in and out of a meeting will be a minimum requirement but encouraged throughout. Rooms will remain empty, after being disinfected, for 24 hours after the event before another group can use the same space. Reservation will be required if you want to use a room.

In order to maintain 6’ distance we will operate at apx. 40% capacity (different rooms because of their shape or set-up will vary).

-Wesley Hall - with tables, 24 (1 single or up to 3 in a family per table)

-Pot Luck - 8 couples or 4 couples and 4 singles

-Parlor 6

-Family Ties - 3 couples + 2 singles or 6 singles

-Friendly Seekers - 6 singles

-Coffee & Conversation classroom 4 couples, 8 individuals

• There will be no gatherings near building entrances, coming or going

* Quilters may return if able to use 6’ distancing (quilt size) limited to a maximum of 4; crafting space is insufficient to allow such distancing so crafting will still be on hold.
* No other outside building use will be permitted.
* Those in the office will remain in separate offices and continue to sanitize the phone, doorknobs, chairs handles, etc. No unnecessary visitors are encouraged.
* Funerals/memorials should be kept to less than 10 in attendance with emphasis on graveside services only. (We will follow recommendations of local funeral homes.)
* High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions),will be encouraged to stay at home.

**PHASE ONE INTERIM – A ONE DAY INTERIM STEP … 5th Sunday, May 31st … Summer Kick-Off/Memorial Day/Senior Day**

﻿This interim worship will happen after a re-evaluation of the situation using the original criteria. Phase 1 will remain in place but we will add:

* Outdoor sunrise ALL CHURCH OUTDOOR worship for those who meet the health standards. (See attached NO coughing, sneezing, etc.) Some can stay in their cars [dependent on securing an FM station for broadcast] and some can sit in family units 6’ apart.

… Wearing face coverings to and from the event will be required and encouraged throughout the service

… Anyone leaving their cars will have hands sanitized coming and going

***PHASE TWO DATE ONLY WILL BE ANNOUNCED TO CONGREGATION***

**PHASE TWO: June 7th** … “with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a second time”\*

Phase Two will be a plan to return to worship, in a limited way, based on a re-evaluation of the situation using the original criteria. Phase 1 will remain in place until then.

Everyone can help by maintaining careful hygiene and hand washing, not touching their face, coughing/sneezing/yawning into their elbow, following the physical/social distancing recommendations, staying at home if they are coughing/sneezing or have any symptoms of illness, and to cooperate with contact tracers *if* they are diagnosed.

RESOURCES:

\*Guidelines from the Federal Task Force “[Opening Up America”](about:blank)

State of Texas [Corona Virus Information](about:blank)

[Wood County Offices](about:blank)