

In-Person Gathering Plan

Decatur Methodist Campus

Purpose: This document details the procedures that Decatur First United Methodist Church will be using to restart in-person gathering, once approved by the Church Council. This document may be amended as needed going into the future.

Guiding principles:

1. **Do no harm.** Any decisions made, or actions taken, are to reduce and minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 to anyone who enters the Church facility. This principle applies to all activities throughout the week, including Worship.
2. **Minimize in-person activities.** By limiting the number of in-person activities during the week, and on Sundays, we limit the opportunities for the COVID-19 Coronavirus to enter Church facilities. Through limited activities within the Church facilities, we also decrease the opportunities for the COVID-19 to be spread to individuals, and then in turn carried into their households.
3. **Provide alternatives.** For those who do not wish, or are unable, to attend in-person worship services and participate in the worship rituals, alternative options will be made to best approximate the worship experience, given the prevailing circumstances. In some cases, changes may need to be made to certain practices of in-person worship and alternatives will be provided where practicable.
4. **Vulnerable Populations.** Persons in a high-risk population, age 65 and older and those with health vulnerabilities, are encouraged to make decision about attending and participating in any activities in a manner which makes them feel comfortable and safe (virtual and online participation is encouraged). Any staff who believes that their presence will put them at risk, may decide to not attend in-person activities without threat to their position.
5. **Protection of Self and Others:** Self-screening before attending any in-person gathering is the responsibility of the individual and is expected. Use of face coverings is encouraged for the safety of others until further notice. Utilization of hand sanitizers throughout the campus is encouraged for the safety of self until further notice. Leadership expects individual mindfulness of social distance from one another at all times.
6. **Notification of Exposure:** It is the responsibility of all persons who gather in-person at the Decatur Methodist Campus to report any exposure event to the church office in a timely manner. See the Notification of Exposure Protocol.

Outdoor Gatherings – Effective Immediately

Updated 5/14/2020. In a recent study reported in *The New York Times*, it was found that outdoor gatherings present low risk to participants when observing social distancing. Groups should refrain from any physical contact or sharing of personal items.

- These groups must be able to practice social distancing. When scheduling, priority will be extended to church groups.
- Number of groups meeting on church property will depend on the ability for people to gather safely without crowding.
- Number of groups in appropriate spaces should follow a staggered calendaring strategy during this phase to limit number of in-person activities at any one time.
- All activities on campus will be scheduled through the church office.
- Groups will be assigned to a space for gathering and it is expected that they will remain in that space.
- Use of common items is discouraged (ie, serving utensils for self-serve food); any food items should be brought by the individual or distributed in prepackaged ways utilizing best food handling practices (ie. A single gloved individual serving food items to others)

In-Person Worship

The ability to return to worship in-person is dependent upon the following criteria:

- Worship seating requirements that ensure social distancing for the safety of all worshipers. This include a plan for redirecting worshiper when the space has reached capacity.
- Recruitment and training of greeters and ushers to assist people in following safe practices when arriving and departing worship space.
- Availability of touchless hand sanitizers, and face covering for those who wish to wear them but forgot theirs.
- Availability of adequate cleaning supplies (disinfectant wipes, disinfectant spray, gloves, etc.).
- Cleaning and disinfectant guidelines for use by volunteers between each service. This will include recruitment and training of volunteers to assist with this task.
- The availability of a reliable tracking tool to facilitate the timely notification of worshiper in the event of a reported exposure incident.

Gathering for Worship:

- Worship times and spaces will be determined to safely gather for in-person worship across the Decatur Methodist Campus.
- Worship space will be clearly marked to ensure social distancing according to the Checklist for Churches/Places of Worship

- Alteration/elimination of elements of worship will be considered to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus to others. This includes considerations for lighting of the altar candles, Communion, Baptisms, greeting time, Kids Time / Pray Ground, offering moment, congregational responses, and singing.
- Use of screens will be encouraged as much as possible initially to eliminate the passing out of bulletins.
- The use of Bibles, hymnals, and other worship aids will be evaluated regularly to determine when it may be safe to begin to use these again.
- Door greeters will open and close doors to reduce the number of touches to door surfaces. Entrance and exits will be clearly marked to assist in the flow of people through our space safely.
- Touchless hand sanitizers will be available at the entrance and exits of the worship space.
- During the initial weeks of in-person Worship, common areas around food/coffee will not be available. Evaluation of these places will be ongoing and implemented when it is safe to do so.
- Online worship will be made available to those who are not able to worship in-person.

Nursery Availability:

- Initially no nursery or kid's activities will be available. Families are encouraged to worship together.
- Nursery will be available for children ages 3 and younger once procedures are available for safe check-in and check-out, and other cleaning protocols are in place and nursery staff trained.
- Kidz Worship will be available once procedures are available for safe check-in and check-out, cleaning protocols, safe distancing practices are determined, and leaders and staff are trained.

In-Person Indoor Programing

The ability to return to a programing will depend upon the following:

- Facility plan for space utilization availability for the scheduling of these events. Including entrances and exits for each space.
- Recruitment and training of leadership to assist people in following safe practices when arriving and departing assigned space.
- Availability of touchless hand sanitizers, and face covering for those who wish to wear them but forgot theirs.
- Availability of adequate cleaning supplies (disinfectant wipes, disinfectant spray, gloves, etc.).
- Cleaning and disinfectant guidelines for use by volunteers following space usage.
- Congregational familiarity with safe gathering behaviors. It is our expectation that the through in-person worship practices, people will develop habits of safe interactions with one another (such as social distancing, mindfulness of touched surfaces, use of face-covering, etc.).

Gathering for Programing (Sunday School, Kidz Worship, youth and children's activities, meetings, small groups,)

- All gathering activities will be scheduled through the Church office. It is possible during the early implementation of these activities they will be scheduled during times other than their pre-Covid-19 timeslots.
- Gathered activities will be staggered to reduce the possibility of crowding or congestion in common areas, entrances, and exits.
- The size of the gathering will be determined by the space plan with social distancing guidelines recommendations by authorities (See Checklist for Churches by the DSHS).

- KidzWorship (hosted during one worship service offering) will be available upon a reliable check-in and check-out system and safe hygiene with young children (see Guidelines for Child Care Centers).
- A reliable tracking system should be used during these activities to aid in the notification of groups should an exposure be reported to the church office.
- During the initial gathering of these activities, it will be best practices to pre-package supplies to be used (ie., crayons, paper, scissors, glue, etc.) to reduce the possibility of Coronavirus spread across common supplies. Ongoing evaluation of these practices will be conducted and changes implemented as appropriate.
- Except for Care Corps activities in support of funerals, food distribution is discouraged initially. Care Corps meals should be individually wrapped and catered by someone with a food handlers license. Evaluation of these practices will be ongoing and restrictions lifted as soon as is safe according the authorities (see Guiding Authorities section of this document).

Adaptation to Ongoing Gatherings

Church leadership will continue to monitor the health and safety of gathering in-person. Alternatives to regimen and practice will shift as information and guidelines for the health and safety of those attending is available.

Guiding Authorities

The following guidelines are taken into consideration when putting together these guidelines and in any decisions, or actions taken in an effort to reduce and minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Texas DSHS Guidelines and Protocols (specifically Checklist for Houses of Worship and Child Care Centers): <https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/opentexas.aspx#protocols>

North Texas Conference Bishop Guidelines for Re-opening Churches
<https://ntcumc.org/coronavirus-resources>

Availability of Testing and other Wise County Notes:
<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=4c5dcf94db8847309d55db076851eb44>

Texas Department of State Health Services COVID-19 Case Dashboard (Trends by County):
<https://tabexternal.dshs.texas.gov/t/THD/views/COVIDExternalQC/COVIDTrends?:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&:embed=y>

We recognize that we have congregation members who work, live, or frequently travel to neighboring counties. Therefore, we will consult the case tracking trends in a three county area: Wise, Tarrant, and Denton.

In addition to the case trends, we will consider other safety precautions as necessary. Such may depend upon the availability of hygiene products, cleaning procedures, facility capacity guidelines, and readiness of trained volunteers to help guide safe movement throughout our spaces.

Self-Screening Protocols

According to the Minimum Standard Health Protocols (Texas Department of State Health Services), persons should monitor for the following new or worsening signs or symptoms:

Cough	Sore Throat	Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
Loss of taste or smell	Diarrhea	Chills / shaking with chills
Temperature of 100° or more	Muscle pain	Headache
Known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19		

If you or someone in your home develops these signs or symptoms, we ask you to continue self-monitoring and refrain from attending any on-campus gatherings.

Health Protocols for Facilities

According to the Minimum Standard Health Protocols (Texas Department of Health and Services), the following disinfectant protocols are to be followed between each gathering.

A complete detail of cleaning procedures for Staff, Contractors, and Volunteers is available through the Church Office.

A minimum standard of health protocols will be including:

- Disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizers will be set out for groups. Please return to the location they were found (area marked off with colored tape). Trash cans (with no lid) will be set out next to each station.
- All flat surfaces, chair backs, door facings, door handles, or other touched surfaces must be wiped with disinfectant following use of space. Vinyl gloves will be available as well for those cleaning. Spray disinfectant should be used on soft surfaces, such as padded chairs.
- Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restrooms by cleaning professionals
- Disinfect seats and surfaces between gatherings/services
- Disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees, including children areas.
- Place readily visible signage to remind everyone of best hygiene practices

EXPOSURE NOTIFICATION PROTOCOL

When a confirmed or presumed case of COVID-19 is known to have been on campus, the following procedures will be followed to ensure the health & safety of all other persons who may have come into contact. Personal details, including names, of presumed or confirmed cases will be held in confidence by the Pastors and Church Staff in all public communication.

Please see the **Exposure Notification Quick Reference Guide** below for further instructions.

FOR PERSONS SYMPTOMATIC OR IN CONTACT WITH COVID-19

Level 1: Symptomatic

If you have been on campus and begin to exhibit COVID-19 symptoms or test positive over the next 14-days, please immediately notify the Church Office by email (administrator@decaturmethodist.org).

Level 2: Close Contact with Confirmed or Presumed COVID-19 Case

If you have been on campus and find out that you have been in close contact with a confirmed or positive COVID-19 case over the previous 14-days, please immediately notify the Church Office by email (administrator@decaturmethodist.org).

Level 3: Distant Contact with Confirmed or Presumed COVID-19 Case

If you have been on campus and find out that you have been in distant contact with a confirmed or positive COVID-19 case over the previous 14-days, please self monitor, continue social distancing, and consider informing fellow attendees. If you become symptomatic while self-monitoring, please notify the Church Office by email (administrator@decaturmethodist.org).

CONGREGATIONAL NOTIFICATION CHANNELS

Upon Receiving Notification of a Confirmed or Presumed COVID-19 Case on Campus

- **Level 1 and Level 2:** The Church Office will immediately communicate with all other persons who simultaneously inhabited the same space and may have been at risk for exposure
- **Level 1:** The Church Office will notify the congregation with a Pastoral Letter via email and a posting on the church websites, including any information about the cleaning/sanitization of campus and/or any closing of campus that may result from exposure to an active case.
- Updated information posted regularly on the COVID-19 page of website (see Plan for Congregational Rollout).

Guidelines for Responding to COVID-19 Case in the Congregation.

These guidelines are based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID Guidelines for Community-Related Exposure and Travel-Related Exposure. They should be modified based on circumstances, guidance from local public health departments and applicable laws.

Exposure Notification for Quick Reference for First United Methodist Church

Level 1: Symptomatic

An individual has been on campus and begins to exhibit COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, shaking with chills, loss of taste/ smell) or test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days.

Instruction: 1) Isolate from congregation, 2) Get a medical assessment and, 3) notify the church office immediately.

Level 2: Close Contact with Confirmed or Presumed COVID-19 Case

Individual has been on campus and finds out that they have been in close contact with a confirmed or positive COVID-19 case over the previous 14-days.

Instruction: 1) Get a medical assessment/advise, 2) notify the church office immediately.

Level 3: Distant Contact with Confirmed or Presumed COVID-19 Case

Individual has been on campus and finds out that they have been in distant contact with a confirmed or positive COVID-19 case over the previous 14 days.

Instruction: 1) Self-monitor, continue social distancing, and practice self-care. Consider informing fellow attendees. If individual becomes symptomatic while self-monitoring, please notify church office.

PLAN FOR CONGREGATIONAL ROLLOUT

In the spirit of transparency, we will make available all guiding documentation & details to our Decatur Methodist Family, while also providing easy-to-read Summary Documents through a variety of channels.

Presentation to Church Council: May 26

Comprehensive Official Information Page with most updated information:

Websites - deaturmethodist.org/Covid & pecanstreetmission.org/Covid

Presentation to Congregation

- Pastor's Letter with Phases Outline via Email
- Comprehensive Information Page at deaturmethodist.org & pecanstreetmission.org
 - Include Pastor's Letter, Phases Outline, and supporting documentation (Cleaning Procedures, Resource Page)
- All Church Video will be made available with regards of what to expect when attending.
- Individual Follow-Up with Leaders (Sunday School Classes, Small Groups, Youth, Children, UMM, etc.) to clarify plans for particular groups, including training for cleaning and tracking of attendees.