

Return to In-Person Worship and Small Groups Plan

Trinity United Methodist Church

Purpose of Plan

The purpose of this plan is to provide a roadmap for Trinity United Methodist Church (UMC) to begin to hold in-person worship in a safe manner that minimizes the risk of persons contracting the COVID-19 virus. The plan will serve as a written guide as Trinity UMC moves toward the phased reopening as outlined by the Virginia Annual Conference in the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM).

We construct this plan not simply as a “way to be together again” or “get back to normal.” Instead, we construct this plan with guidance from the Holy Spirit so that we might continue our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We believe that returning to in-person worship (along with continuing online worship) will help us be effective in making disciples and help us “see all the people.”

Introduction

Trinity UMC recognizes that we are in the midst of an historic, disruptive time as our nation and our church has responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic has forced us to pivot and become creative in worship and with small groups, it has offered us an opportunity to truly realize that the church is not a building, but the church is a people.

We affirm, along with the Virginia Annual Conference, John Wesley’s Three Simple Rules.

1. Do No Harm. We want to do everything in our power as the Body of Christ to present a safe environment for public worship. We especially want to be sensitive to those who are in the “at risk” category.
2. Do Good. Our church’s plan represents a clear and articulate effort to properly balance the need to be the body of Christ together and following strict protocols to provide a safe environment for those who might gather.
3. Stay in Love with God. We recognize that worship itself and many components of worship are a means of grace. We offer the following plan, praying that we are doing our best so that more and more people will come to know the love of God and passionately stay in it.

We adopt the measures contained in this plan because we care for our church and community.

Return to In-Person Worship

At Trinity UMC we will follow the requirements and rules of the TAM as a way of loving our neighbors at this time. The health and safety of our members, guests, staff, and our general community demands that we strictly adhere to all of these requirements, rules, and protocols.

Preparation

Trinity UMC took the actionable steps outlined below before drafting this plan in anticipation of safely returning to in-person worship.

- Created a Healthy Church Team (HCT) which met during this stage to prepare the church for in-person worship. The purpose of the Trinity HCT is to provide advice and counsel to the Pastor and to the chairs of the Trustees, Church Council and Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee.
- The Trinity HCT will continue to coordinate with the clergy, staff, volunteers, and the District Superintendent on a number of issues associated with creating a plan for in-person worship that complies with the requirements, rules, and protocols of the TAM. The Trinity HCT will give particular consideration to:
 - Preparing the building.
 - Accommodating worship with strict distancing (6 feet or more).
 - Face coverings.
 - Cleaning protocols.
 - Communicating plans with the congregation and the community.
- The Trinity HCT team worked during this time to determine the church's readiness, willingness, and ability to move to different forms of in-person worship.
- The Trinity HCT, along with the whole church, engaged in a day of prayer and fasting to discern God's leading as it relates to the return to in-person worship.
- The Trinity HCT discussed the following questions as found in the TAM:
 - **What have we learned?**
 - Ask the team to assess the ministry of the church during the shutdown period?
 - What did we learn to do differently?
 - What blessings did God send to us?
 - What gifts did we have that we didn't know we had?
 - What are we doing that we want to keep doing?
 - What things that we used to do can we stop doing?

Return to In-Person Worship

Based on the recommendation of the Trinity HCT, the Trinity UMC Council has determined that it is ready after much preparation to return to in-person worship if approved by the District Superintendent. We will maintain the protocols as outlined below. If approved, we will now be able to receive persons at up to 50% of our capacity.

We will continue to offer online streaming worship or its equivalent for those who are in a vulnerable population or choose not to attend in-person worship. In-person worship will be limited to 50 people (clergy and worship leaders excluded) by reservation to ensure we are able to maintain the protocol.

General Protocol

All persons, including the pastor, will wear a face covering at all times. The church requests that persons provide their own face coverings, but Trinity UMC will provide a face covering if needed. If a person has breathing difficulties and cannot wear a face covering, the person cannot attend an in-person service.

The Trinity HCT will continue to monitor the number of new cases, hospitalizations and deaths resulting from COVID-19 in King George County and make necessary recommendations to the Church Council for their consideration.

The church will ask attendees to provide their own hand sanitizer. Trinity UMC will provide hand sanitizer at strategic locations in the church as needed.

There will be no handshakes, fist bumps, elbow touches or hugs in order to effectively maintain social distancing. This will be clearly communicated to the congregation before and during worship and greeters and ushers will monitor for those who forget this protocol.

Registration

We are requiring persons who wish to attend a Sunday Service to register their desire to attend. This will help us keep a count of how many people we expect so we can maintain proper ratios so we retain the ability to socially distance while worshiping. We will accomplish this in multiple ways.

- We will provide a Google Form Link on our Facebook page and on our website.
- Persons who do not have access to the Internet and regularly attend Trinity UMC will be mailed information about registration and be instructed to call or mail the church secretary to make a reservation.
- The church secretary and Pastor will serve as our point persons to keep the list of those making a reservation as well as their contact information should it be needed.

Preparing to Attend Services

Those attending the service will be asked to complete a temperature check at home before attending worship and will be asked to stay home if their temperature is at or above 100.4 degrees or they are sick in any way.

All attendees will be asked to either;

- A. Review their own health and fill out a Health Acknowledgment Form and complete it online or email the Health Acknowledgment Form to the church secretary or Pastor. The Health Acknowledgment Form may also be mailed or dropped off at the church. The Health Acknowledgment Form and other health related information will be reviewed by the local clergy only at the local church level and it will be secured in a confidential folder in a locked file cabinet in the Pastor's office. The Health Acknowledgment Form and other health related information about a staff member, church member, guest, or vendor will also be available for review by the District Superintendent, the Cabinet, the Office of the Bishop, or the Chancellor. Also, the local church, District Superintendent, the Cabinet, the Office of the Bishop, or the Chancellor will cooperate with any federal, state, or local health agency that request the Health Acknowledgment Form or other health related information for legitimate purposes, including, but not limited to, COVID-19 contact tracing by the Department of Health; or,
- B. Acknowledge and answer the posted questions regarding health status before entering the church to the servant staffing the welcome table outside the sanctuary doors.

Service Logistics

Before we meet for our first in-person worship we will hold a soft launch to practice. Our goal will be to have at least 15 people attend this service to help us "work out" any potential issues and practice logistics before a regular Sunday service. This will be an abbreviated worship service as compared to the regular Sunday worship service.

We will offer digital bulletins or bulletins sent ahead by mail for our in-person worship services. In the event we utilize paper bulletins as part of the in-person worship service, paper bulletins will be placed in the worship space 24 or more hours before the gathering by masked and gloved volunteers. The direct exchange of bulletins or other materials between participants will be avoided.

All hymnals, Bibles and other common items in pew racks will be removed before in-person worship. Attendees may bring their own Bible from home. These items shall not be passed and must be removed from the sanctuary.

We will utilize projection for responsive readings and other worship elements traditionally printed in a bulletin.

In addition to face coverings, disposable gloves for Greeters, Ushers, Communion Helpers, and Counters will be used if available.

There will be no congregational singing.

The nursery will not be available.

Offering plates will be placed at the exit of the church building and attendees may deposit their offering on the way out.

The Communion table will be prepared by the pastor using gloves and a face mask. Pre-packaged Communion elements will be on the Communion table during the service and Communion liturgy. A loaf of bread and a cup of juice will be on the Communion table to be visibly blessed, broken, and lifted by the pastor. The Communion table will be at least 6 feet from where worshippers are seated. Following the consecration of elements, the pre-packaged communion elements will be moved on a tray to a table near the exit to receive as worshippers leave. As worshippers pick up the pre-packaged Communion elements they will exit the building and partake of the elements outdoors in the parking lot, maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from persons not in their household. After sanitizing hands, worshippers will momentarily remove their face coverings to partake of the elements and then sanitize hands again. Worshippers will be asked to dispose of the packages at their homes.

Parking

We will pay special attention to parking and flow. Persons should avoid parking closer than 6 feet to another vehicle and should wait until others have exited their car and gotten a safe distance away before exiting their car.

A greeter will be stationed outside the building to remind persons about the face covering requirement and remind them to please keep proper physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others). If a person does not have a face covering they will be asked to not enter. An additional greeter shall be stationed outside the primary entrance to facilitate the asking and answering of the health question normally a part of the Health Questionnaire. An additional greeter will be inside the sanctuary to further ensure persons are wearing a facemask and direct persons to seating so they can practice social distancing inside the sanctuary. This person will further monitor the congregation during the worship time to ensure persons continue to wear their face coverings.

Facilities

We will have one designated entrance and one designated exit to the church sanctuary that will be used by all able-bodied persons.

One gender-neutral bathroom will be available for in-person worship. Persons should practice proper social distancing in using the bathrooms. We will create a flow pattern for persons to follow.

Cleaning Plan

As we move forward with in-person worship we will utilize a Cleaning Plan.

- After each Sunday worship service high touch areas will be sanitized.

- We will clean and sanitize the sanctuary so that people can adequately comply with physical social distancing.
- Before beginning in-person worship, we will need to clean the sanctuary or confirm that it has been cleaned since it was closed. This needs to be communicated to the District Superintendent and to the congregation in accordance with our communication plan.
- We will need to ensure the church has adequate amounts of cleaning and sanitization products. We will check cleaners for EPA and FDA labels as being effective against coronaviruses. Alcohol-based surface cleaners are adequate to kill this virus.
- We will clean handrails, bathrooms, the back of pews and other common surfaces.
- In addition to the items above we will also clean the A V and computer equipment.
- We will minimize the reasons persons would touch common surfaces (doorknobs, etc.) while in the building – leaving some doors open during services.

Signage

We will offer clear signage to provide clear directives to attendees on how to behave and uphold protocols. Signs will mark designated entrances, exits, and building traffic patterns. Signs will mark seating arrangements and provide social-distancing instruction. They should also remind people to practice physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others), hand washing, and not to touch their faces.

Social Distancing

A key component moving forward is having a Physical Distancing Plan (6 feet or more)

- As we contemplate how people will flow through our facility we will need to think of “pinch points” where persons would have difficulty social distancing. We will then need to brainstorm ways to remedy these “pinch points.” Some of these “pinch points” might include entrances, exits, sanctuary flow, restrooms, narthex traffic or others.
- We will need a volunteer whose mission is to monitor persons to graciously help keep physical distancing. This can be the same person as the inside greeter.
- Family members that have been together the entire time are not required to be 6 feet apart and may sit together. This may impact others who will need to be six feet from the family unit.
- An usher will dismiss people so as to provide for social distancing when we exit instead of everyone getting up to move as soon as worship is over.

Seating

We will devise a seating plan for the sanctuary and fellowship hall (if needed for overflow) that will allow attendees to properly social distance.

Communication

A key component moving forward will be a comprehensive Communication Plan.

- We will send communications (via letter and email) to our regular attendees with the plan for services offered and the rules for registration and attendance.
- We will post these instructions for worship on our website along with the rules for attendance. We will also include the communication on Facebook and in our email newsletter.
- We will create a walk-through video of what the new normal will be like.
- We will create or purchase signage to direct people (see signage above), to mark any washing hands/sanitizer locations, and where appropriately social distancing seating is located.

We will provide digital material for our worship service ahead of time by posting the bulletin on our website or social media platform and/or emailing our members the bulletin. Hardcopies will be mailed to those without internet or email.

Enforcement

All enforcement will be completed with the utmost concern for the safety of all with an abundance of grace.

If someone removes his/her face covering, they will be asked to put the face covering back on. If the person refuses, the service will be stopped and everyone will leave. The person that violates the “mandatory face covering rule” will not be allowed back on church property until he/she agrees to comply with all of the requirements, rules, and protocols. The same is true for failing to abide by strict physical social distancing (staying 6 feet or more away from others). If someone fails to abide by the physical social distancing requirement, they will be asked to do so. If the person refuses, the service will be stopped and everyone will leave. The person that violates the “physical social distancing rule” will not be allowed back on church property until he/she agrees to comply with all of the requirements, rules, and protocols. The safety of everyone is of utmost importance and we will not allow anyone to endanger the safety of our members, guests, and the community.

Emergency Plan

It will be necessary to have a plan to deal with emergencies. This will include:

- Having an isolation or holding room for those who are or become symptomatic at the church.
- Contact information for medical professionals and local public health authority, 911 address of the church, local emergency departments, in a visible place in the church. This will be posted in our fellowship hall next to the phone.

Continued Ministry with High Risk and Vulnerable Populations

We will intentionally reach out to those vulnerable populations who cannot attend in-person worship. This we will accomplish by offering Facebook Live, recorded video, printed sermons and through the regular calling and checking in with those in this population.

Servant Leaders

In order to implement the protocols we will need a variety of servant-leaders.

- We will need servant-leaders to serve on the Healthy Church Team, as outside and inside greeters, and as ushers.
- Staff and volunteers will also need to adhere to all requirements, rules, and protocols.

Sharing Learnings

As part of this plan and its implementation we hope to provide guidance to similarly sized churches across the Virginia Annual Conference. We will remain open to sharing this plan and talking with others about their own plans and implementation.

We intend to fully participate in any and all opportunities to collaborate with others in our District and Conference in whatever form such collaboration will take.

HCT Actions and Tasks

1. Recommendation to move forward or not by the Trinity HCT and forwarded to Council for consideration. If approved by Council then forwarded to DS for approval.
2. Trinity HCT discusses what have we learned questions.
3. Hand sanitizer stations set up.
4. Registration logistics worked out.
 - a. Create Google Form for registration.
 - b. Post Google Form
 - c. Persons asked to fill out Health Acknowledgment Form (Google Form) or over phone or in-person before entering buildings.
5. All worship and other materials removed from the sanctuary.
6. Create PowerPoints for responsive readings/ worship elements and come up with projection plan.
7. Provide gloves to greeters, ushers and counters.
8. Put offering plates at exit of sanctuary.
9. Create instructions/ training for greeters, ushers.
10. Create signage for entry/ exit and other signage required in Handbook.
11. Identify cleaning person/service.
12. Clean sanctuary before in-person worship.
13. Purchase cleaning supplies.
14. Brainstorm “pinch point” areas for social distancing and create a traffic flow plan.
15. Hold soft launch worship service to practice.
16. Facebook Live test for overflow.
17. Overflow Set up.
18. Create video for new worship normal/ walk through video as part of communication plan.
19. Layout seating arrangement in sanctuary.
20. Identify holding room should someone get sick.
21. Post emergency contacts near phones
22. Devise budget for cleaning supplies, signage, other needed materials.
23. Create group registration form.

Elements to Share with Congregation Prior to In-Person Worship

1. The date for resumption of in-person worship.
2. Need to register and fill out Health Registration Form or answer questions at door.
3. Face covering requirement.
4. Parking plan.
5. Entrance and exit.
6. No hugging, handshakes, fist bumps or elbow bumps.
7. Take temperature before coming to worship.
8. Communion procedure.
9. Dismissal procedure.
10. Offering plates at exit.
11. Sanctuary has been cleaned and will be cleaned weekly.
12. Please minimize travel within the building and use of bathroom.
13. No Sunday School or nursery.

Servant Leaders Needed

1. Welcome Desk Attendant
2. Two Greeters- inside and parking lot
3. Usher