

## **Laingsburg UMC's Multi-Phase Reopening Plan**

This document is a multi-phase reopening plan for Laingsburg UMC, compiled by an *ad hoc* team consisting of Rev. Brian West, John Peck (*Lay Leader*), David Sebenick (*Finance Committee Chairperson*) and Dr. Stephanie West, DO (*Family Medicine Physician*), and in consultation with the Michigan Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church (UMC) and other helpful resources.

It is to be understood that this plan is not intended to function as a legal document, but rather as a guide – a road map of sorts - for helping the church's leadership and congregation move through this unprecedented time. This plan is, for the most part, without timeline, but will be followed in close consultation with the Michigan Conference of The UMC and public health officials, and in conjunction with state/federal government guidance and/or orders. Where ambiguity may exist, it is for the purpose of allowing for "best practices" to be adjusted by church leadership.

*Ultimately, as the Body of Christ and as a Christian church, we have a mandate far greater than any civil law, and that is to care for God's creation, including, without question, the health and lives of our neighbors.*

As we move through this plan, it is important to note that there is always a possibility that conditions will not improve as hoped for, and that infections will increase and/or other public health requirements may not be met. Should this happen, this plan may need to be amended, delayed, and/or precautions tightened for a period of time. If necessary, the church may need to retreat to a previous phase. Conversely, the mysterious nature of this pandemic *may* make it possible for the plan to be accelerated. In other words, the plan may not unfold in a linear fashion.

### **"SAFER AT HOME"**

This phase is, at the time of forming this plan, our current reality. It exists in conjunction with Governor Whitmer's current "Stay-at-Home" order and is advised by the Michigan Conference. During this time, and until the executive order is lifted, we will conduct the ministry of the church by practicing the following:

- We will continue holding worship services via online forums, including (but not limited to) Facebook and YouTube. Recordings will be done from the homes of all involved in worship leadership. The lead pastor will coordinate these pre-recorded/live services.
- All Bible studies, prayer meetings, small groups, and committees will continue to meet remotely (i.e. online) as possible and necessary. Groups not already doing so are encouraged to explore this possibility.
- Pastoral Care will be continued remotely using set "Here for You" hours and/or other procedures determined by the lead pastor.
- Regular communication with the congregation will continue through regular church emails and occasional mailings, as necessary.
- Minimal office drop-in by staff and select volunteers for only essential business operations. This will be coordinated between the pastor and staff/volunteers and the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).

- The Laingsburg Area Food Bank will continue to provide curbside service for their clients using existing social distancing practices, necessary Personal Protective Equipment, and adequate cleaning/disinfecting practices.
- All offerings and financial donations will be conducted either through our online giving option, or by US Mail.

During this phase, the building will remain closed for all other activities and purposes. Custodial services will continue, primarily for areas being used by the Food Bank volunteers and those conducting essential business operations.

*\*Please note that, throughout each phase of this plan, all persons who are considered to be higher-risk individuals (i.e. age 60+ and/or those with underlying health conditions) are encouraged to continue sheltering in place. If the higher-risk individuals choose to be present and follows the plan's guidelines, it is important that they understand the potential risk they assume.*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

## Phase 1 –

Phase 1 will begin with the following considerations: Michigan's "Stay-at-Home" executive order is lifted and in consultation with what the Michigan Conference of The UMC advises churches to do so.

During this phase, we will continue to be the church remotely with a few exceptions. The following practices are necessary for Phase One.

- Worship services will continue to be streamed online only (pre-recorded or live), but conducted in the Sanctuary with only those in worship leadership present. All participants will practice social distancing and mask wearing as practical.
- ~~Bible studies, prayer meetings, and small groups will continue to meet remotely (i.e. online) as possible. Groups not already doing so are encouraged to explore this possibility.~~ **Small groups of no more than 10 people will be permitted to gather at the church, utilizing large open areas of the building including the narthex and fellowship hall. Full mask compliance and social distancing shall be practiced. A sing-in sheet must be completed for each small group gathering containing the date and time of the gathering for the purposes of contact tracing if necessary. All surfaces utilized must be wiped down at the conclusion of each gathering. This will be effective October 1, 2020. (Amended by the Church Leadership Team on September 14, 2020)**
- Pastoral care will be continued remotely using set "Here for You" hours or other procedures determined by the lead pastor.
- Funeral and Memorial Services on the church property will be limited to 10 people in attendance with the suggestion being that only immediate family be present.
- Weddings will be limited to 10 people in attendance.
- Office functions **and regular office hours resumed as of June 1, 2020 in preparation for the pastoral transition.** ~~including only relevant staff, will resume in a limited way in order to maintain and ensure essential operations. The interim schedule will be determined by the lead pastor in consultation with the staff member(s) and the SPRC. No employee of the church will be forced to return until they deem it personally safe.~~

- Those in the office should be wearing masks when two or more are present, maintaining physical distancing and hygiene protocols, and make sure that workspace surfaces are regularly sanitized. ~~No office volunteers will be allowed during Phase 1.~~ Office volunteers will be allowed at this time but will be limited. All volunteers must wear face coverings/masks and maintain social distancing (Amended by the Church Leadership Team on September 14, 2020).
- Leadership teams, Missional Focus Teams, and Care Group ~~will continue to meet and function remotely.~~ may now gather in person as detailed above (Amended by the Church Leadership Team on September 14, 2020). An exception can be made for *essential* tasks that require in-person meeting (i.e. a team to rearrange the sanctuary for later phase in-person worship).
- Community groups—except AA (Amended by the Church Leadership Team on July 13, 2020)—will still be asked to continue their functions remotely. There will be no rentals during this time.
- The Laingsburg Area Food Bank will continue to provide curbside service for their clients using existing social distancing practices, necessary PPE, and adequate cleaning/disinfecting practices.

## Phase 2 –

Phase 2 will begin with the following considerations: Michigan allows for in-person gathering not exceeding 50 people and a recommendation from the Michigan Conference of The UMC and the Bishop's office is made for in-person gatherings not exceeding 50 people.

During this second phase, we will begin to make a shift toward in-person worship and regular office functions. The allowances at this phase include:

### In-Person Worship:

- In-person worship will not exceed 50 people in attendance.
- The in-person worship service will be live-streamed and made available in online forums.
- The sanctuary will be physically arranged to create seating that maintains appropriate physical distance (minimum 6 feet) with the following general rule; "If you live together, you may sit together."
- All people in attendance will be required to wear a mask. Appropriate masks will be supplied for anyone without one of their own.
- The celebration of Holy Communion and the consumption of the elements will continue to be postponed until a safe practice for sharing and consuming the elements is possible. It is also necessary that it satisfy the theological considerations of the UMC.
- The Sacrament of Baptism will not be conducted during this time.
- Certain temporary practices for worship will be implemented in order to decrease the risk to all those present. They include, but are not limited to:
  - Refraining from congregational and solo singing as it increases the likelihood of virus transmission via droplets, even with masks.
  - There will be no-touch alternatives for greeting one another, collecting the offering, and sharing the "Order of Worship." Bibles, hymnals, envelopes and other commonly handled items will be removed from the pews. Attendance pads will not be passed through the pews. Instead, a photo will be taken of the congregation present each Sunday. The projection screen will likely be the primary source of readings, etc.

- Fellowship time before and after worship, including coffee hour, meals, potlucks, etc. will be postponed until otherwise notified.
- Only the rear ramp entrance will be utilized on Sunday mornings. The church will be opened to the congregation 10 minutes prior to worship and closed 10 minutes following the service's conclusion. All those in attendance will be dismissed by row in order to exit the church immediately after the worship service concludes. The Fellowship Hall and classrooms will be closed on Sunday mornings. Mingling in the parking lot is *strongly discouraged*.
- The assigned usher for each Sunday will remain in the Narthex during the worship service, performing the following duties before, during and after the service:
  - Stand near the ramp entrance prior to the service and provide a mask to those without one, already.
  - Ensuring everyone sanitizes their hands upon entering the building.
  - Keeping an accurate headcount and limit attendance to 50 people.
  - Monitoring offering receptacles.
- Funeral and memorial services can continue with careful attention to maintaining physical distancing measures, mandatory masks for each person, and keeping the attendance under 50 people – perhaps with consideration given to encouraging family to invite only close family and close friends for the service. Please note that Funeral/Memorial Luncheons cannot be served/held until further notice.

#### Bible Studies, Small Groups, and Leadership/Ministry Teams:

- ~~All small group gatherings, community groups, and Leadership & Ministry Teams are to continue meeting remotely.~~
- No building rentals will be permitted during this phase.
- In-person Vacation Bible School, children and youth programming will be postponed until deemed safe to regather. Virtual options are encouraged.

#### Church Business:

- Only the ramp entrance will be unlocked during posted office hours.
- Regular office functions and hours can resume with attention paid to maintaining physical distancing, wearing masks, and regular sanitizing. All persons entering the building are required to wear appropriate masks and maintain physical distance.
- A log will be kept in the office with names of all those who enter the building each day.

#### Physical Building Considerations

- Signs will be posted at the ramp entrance with the following information:
  - Symptoms of COVID-19, urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if symptoms are present. (Note: persons with symptoms are not permitted to remain in the building).
  - Proper mask wearing and care.
  - Hand washing signs will be located in each restroom above the sink, along with a reminder on the inside of the bathroom door(s).
- Hand Sanitizing stations will be located at the ramp entrance, sanctuary entrance, and office entrance. Signage will require everyone to sanitize before entering these spaces.
- Bathrooms will be well stocked with soap and paper towel.
- The building will be cleaned following Food Bank operations and on Sundays after the worship service.

- If anyone who has been in the building, regardless of when they were present, tests positive for COVID-19, the pastor will be in contact with health officials (i.e. State or County Health Departments) in order to cooperate with contact tracing and/or other necessary measures.
  - In the event this occurs, all in-person church activity will be suspended until proper cleaning has been performed and it is deemed safe to resume.
  - In the event this occurs, the congregation will be informed via email according to health officials' recommendations.
- The Laingsburg Area Food Bank will continue to provide curbside service for their clients using strict social distancing practices, necessary PPE, and adequate cleaning/disinfecting practices.

### **Next Phases –**

At this time, additional phases are not articulated, simply because it's difficult at this point to know exactly what these phases will look like. Ideally, these phases would provide us with an increasingly clear picture of an emerging "new normal" for the church. As time goes on, masks may be necessary, as may be some social distancing. It is possible that limits on gathering sizes may loosen. As these additional phases emerge, the pastor and church leadership will be in consultation with health officials, the Michigan Conference, and others in order to help define those phases more concretely.

### **Resources:**

"24 Questions You Church Should Answer Before Reopening"

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

Wisconsin Council of Churches' "Returning to Church: Ministry During the COVID-19 Outbreak"

"Michigan Conference's First Sunday Back"

"Principles and Directions for the Reopening of UMC Facilities in Michigan"

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Shiawassee County Health Department