

Regathering Plan for University Baptist Church

As of June 7, 2020

University Baptist Church has not “closed,” because our church is our *people*, a congregation as vibrant and engaged as ever. This Regathering Plan is about how we begin returning safely to our building. Because this pandemic is so difficult to predict, our plans will necessarily change as we adapt, incorporating lessons learned and best practices based on a greater understanding of the virus and its spread.

The stages outlined below are similar to the 3-Phase plans described by our government and public health officials, and our progression through these stages will be informed by their approach. However, all decisions about the pace of UBC’s regathering will be made by our staff, in conversation with Deacons and Church Council (i.e., if the Governor moves the state to Phase 2, this does not mean our church will automatically proceed to our next stage). All updates and decisions will be clearly communicated to the congregation.

Stage 1: Safer at Home (now)

- **Worship:** virtual services only
- **Groups:** no groups (church groups or external building use) meeting in building. Groups are encouraged to use online tools, such as Zoom.
- **Office:** essential office work and building maintenance continues; encourage working remotely when possible

Stage 2: Partial Regathering -- tentatively begins July 12

- **Worship:** virtual worship continues, with a few congregants returning in person as they feel comfortable doing so. Precautions are outlined below:
 - **Entry/Exit:** guidance to facilitate distancing
 - Encourage congregants to enter and exit through the main sanctuary doors by West Main Street if possible, to streamline entry and exit and reduce touching door handles
 - Congregants needing an accessible entrance can use the ramp by the West Main Street doors, or if necessary enter through the Ground Floor entrance and use the elevator (restricted to one family in the elevator at a time)
 - Arrange narthex in a way that streamlines foot traffic and facilitates safe pick-up of bulletins and communion elements
 - Doors are propped open to reduce contact with surfaces
 - Door handles cleaned frequently
 - Hand sanitizer readily available and encouraged upon entry/exit
 - Additional signage posted regarding building entry and our procedures, including the signage mandated by the state of Virginia
 - that no one with symptoms should enter, that social distance must be maintained, that online worship options are also available, etc.

- **Seating:** congregants must keep six feet between family units at all times
 - Pews are marked to assist with social distancing
 - Where appropriate, Ushers or Greeters will assist people in selecting where to sit
- **Sanctuary Set-Up**
 - No hymnals, pew Bibles, pencils, literature, or Red Books will be in the sanctuary
 - Offering Plates on will be located on the Communion table and at exits for receiving envelopes or other information
 - Readers will be a combination of sanctuary readers and video readers. Sanctuary readers will read from a microphone on the floor to facilitate distancing from other worship leaders.
- **Singing** - Our choir will not be singing or seated in the choir loft. Unfortunately, public singing has been shown to be particularly dangerous during this pandemic, because singing produces airborne particles that carry the virus. For this reason, congregational hymn-singing will be approached with caution. Worshipers in the sanctuary are encouraged either to sing very quietly under a mask or to read and ponder the lyrics while listening to the music. Updated guidance will be given as we gain a greater understanding of the risks. (People worshipping at home are encouraged to sing loudly and enthusiastically!)
- **Children** - No children's activities or childcare provided, due to difficulty distancing. Families are encouraged to sit together during the service.
- **Masks** - Everyone must wear masks while in the Sanctuary, and while entering and exiting. Masks may be removed by worship leaders as they lead their elements in the service. The church has a supply of masks made by church volunteers; anyone who needs a mask may have one of these.
- **Communion** - Communion will be served in a prepackaged format, rather than passing elements or using a common cup. Communion elements will be available to pick up at the entrance.
- **Greeters & Ushers** - There will be no ushers touching and handing out bulletins. A greeter will be on duty, typically outside, to greet worshipers from a distance and explain our procedures as needed. The greeter will be the one to prop open and close the church doors.
- **Worship Bulletins** - We encourage people to download the bulletin before worship or use a QR code to download it to their own tablet upon arrival at worship. Simple worship bulletins will also be printed and copies will be in the narthex for pickup. Hymns will be printed in the bulletins, as will a summary of these worship precautions.
- **Video Clips** - The service will continue to use video clips for readings and music so that we can continue to engage congregants at home in our worship. In order for these videos to be seen in the sanctuary, two screens will be at the front to play the video clips.
- **Social Interactions** - Before and after the service, people may interact briefly with one another and the ministers, provided they maintain an appropriate distance and wear a mask. Outdoor interactions are preferable. Lengthy in-person

fellowship, while something we cherish, is not encouraged until the situation is safer.

- **Bathrooms** - Bathrooms will be available and will have been cleaned, usually on the Friday before. Congregants are urged to spread out between the ground, 1st, and 2nd floor bathrooms. Signs will be posted encouraging the washing of hands and/or the use of hand sanitizer, which will be provided.
- **Bible Study** - The Sunday Bible Study led by Will and Matt will conclude for the summer on June 28, so there will be no meeting in the Sanctuary prior to the start of worship.
- **Groups:** encouraged to continue meeting virtually
 - Limited building use by small groups may be approved case-by-case by church staff, provided social distancing is followed and masks are worn.
- **Office:** essential office work and building maintenance continues; combination of working remotely and working in the office
- **General Precautions** for everyone in the building:
 - Strict social distancing must be followed at all times (six feet apart unless in the same family)
 - Masks must be worn at all times, unless alone in a room/office or while leading worship
- **Building Protocols**
 - Increased sanitation of high-touch surfaces
 - Hand sanitizer readily available
 - Additional signage regarding our procedures

Stage 3: Increased Regathering -- date TBA as risk decreases

- **Worship:** physical attendance increases, while many will continue to join us virtually. People at high risk of severe infection are encouraged to continue worshipping virtually.
 - In general, the precautions outlined in Stage 2 continue. Any loosening of restrictions will be announced clearly as public health concerns permit.
 - It may be possible to ease some social distancing restrictions, but some form of distancing is likely to continue. Because singing is a high risk factor in the spread of COVID-19, we will most likely encourage light singing or reading and meditating on the words of the hymns.
- **Groups:** more Bible study groups, committees, and others may resume meeting in person, as the group feels comfortable meeting safely. Staff approve external building use on a case-by-case basis.
 - Programming for children and youth will be evaluated and decisions made based on the latest information available
- **Office:** the Church Office moves toward typical functioning, with physical presence the norm
- **General Precautions** for everyone in the building:
 - Recommendations for social distancing and mask-wearing will be made based on the most current understanding of transmission risks and best practices
- **Building Protocols**

- Continue increased sanitation of high-touch surfaces
- Hand sanitizer readily available
- Updated signage regarding our procedures

New Normal -- (when vaccination/immunity is reached)

From our perspective early in the pandemic, it is hard to predict how the New Normal will look. We anticipate things like this:

- Physical gathering becomes our primary mode of worship and fellowship, while we continue to provide opportunities to participate virtually
- In-person programming for all ages resumes
- Hymnals and pew Bibles available for use in the sanctuary, unless this does not seem necessary because people download the bulletin to their tablets.
- The return of coffee and refreshments
- Lengthy conversations, joyful fellowship and long-awaited hugs and handshakes
- Lessons from the pandemic remain with us, as the new normal is not an exact return to the past. God's Spirit leads us into this future even stronger and more agile than before

Other considerations:

- Response plan if someone who has been in the building later tests positive for COVID-19
 - Extend the church's compassion to the infected individual, supporting them materially, emotionally, and spiritually in any ways that we can
 - Remain sensitive both to the infected individual's privacy and to the public health necessity of informing others who may have been exposed
 - Inform others who were present in the building of the potential exposure, so that they can take appropriate precautions and/or seek testing as necessary
 - Record worship attendance each week so that outreach can be made if necessary
- Church staff will carefully monitor the statistics and recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Virginia Department of Health, and the Thomas Jefferson Health District, along with recommendations and mandates from the state government. UBC's Regathering Plan will be adjusted accordingly, taking into account this evolving understanding of this virus and best practices for gathering safely.