

A message from the FUMC Reopening Committee:

The Covid pandemic has been a long and disruptive event for our world, our country, and certainly our houses of worship. Thankfully, the current trajectory of the outbreak seems to be moving quickly in a positive direction – thanks to vaccinations and precautions taken by the population.

Our First Church Family has been faithful in following the recommended guidelines given to us by the Holston Conference and put forth by the Reopening Committee. We have been moving toward our goal of resuming worship for our congregation. Many positive steps have been taken gradually throughout the past few months which reflect the relaxation of the original safety restrictions:

March 7 – resumed in-person worship

March 14 – youth began meeting outside

March 25 - discontinued color-coded gathering protocol (essentially keeping everything open indefinitely)

March 27 - held in-person Egg Hunt for community

April 4 – reopened balcony for seating – Stopped seating charts, shifted to stickers on pews

April 11 - stopped seating by ushers, only giving directions as needed

May 2 – added more worship participants/singers

May 9 – resumed nursery - started printing paper bulletins - Bibles & Hymnals can be returned to sanctuary

May 16 – resumed Sunday School - loosened restrictions for entry/exit for building and sanctuary

Recent news from government agencies and from the Holston Conference will allow FUMC to move forward with more changes to ease restrictions while we worship together:

The Holston Conference asks all worship participants to continue wearing masks while inside the church. This is intended to continue protect all attendees at a time when we may have vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals at our services.

Beyond this requirement, and as an effort to move the worship service to a more “normal” setting, the congregation will be invited to participate in praying *The Lord’s Prayer*, responsive readings and congregational singing. Our staff has done advance planning for services (special music, soloists, readers, etc.) so these additions will be on a gradual basis. Please follow the guidance of our pastors and worship leaders as they guide us in congregational participation. Bibles and hymnals will be in each pew.

Anticipated dates for additional steps toward fully re-opening;

- May 23 - Lord's Prayer in unison (and other simple responses)
- May 30 - Responsive Call to Worship, Confession
- June 6 - Responsive Communion liturgy/prayer
- June 13 - one Congregational song

The "new" elements each week will be added to the previous elements and continue from that date forward.

Additionally, we will no longer require worshippers to be escorted to specific seats at the beginning of the service, nor to be dismissed by rows at the end of the service. Please, also feel free to spend time in fellowship with others before and after the service.

We are excited about other events in the coming weeks and encourage your participation:

- Youth mission trip (June 20-25)
- Camp in the Community (July 5-9)
- Baseball game outing (June 16)

We are also pleased that the food pantry has stayed open throughout the pandemic!

Please know that our pastors, staff and committee members welcome these continuing steps toward a complete reopening of our church home and look forward to seeing each of you in the weeks ahead.