



"The people of Center Grove are an irresistible light on a hill winning souls for Jesus Christ."

RETURN TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP PLAN¹

On March 13, 2020, a public health emergency was declared in the State of Alabama due to the potential of widespread exposure to COVID-19. Shortly thereafter, COVID-19 became a global pandemic – requiring the closure of our schools, our jobs, and our places of worship. While the various “Shelter in Place” and Safer at Home” orders issued have helped slow the spread of this disease, they also forced us to identify new ways to connect virtually to continue our worship services and bible studies. Connecting remotely in fellowship and communicating virtually have now become our new normal. Despite these difficult times, we are reminded of the sacred value of the gathered community and of embodied worship.

The decision to resume in-person activities has been a complex one that our leadership team has not taken lightly. While we are eager to return to our building, the health and safety of our community is of paramount concern. Center Grove has developed the following plan for returning to in-person worship (and other activities) in phases using the guidelines from the CDC, the Alabama Department of Public Health, the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, and local/state/federal government officials. Please review this plan in full as you think through what restrictions apply and which phase may best be suited for your personal return. We are praying for your spiritual, emotional *and* physical health – and we hope to see you (in person) again soon.

¹ This Plan is subject to change as needed at the discretion of the Senior Pastor and the Board of Trustees. While a revised version of this plan may not immediately be available, up-to-date information can be found by contacting the church office or on the church website at www.centergroveumc.org.

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I. RETURN PHASES

The table below contains a summary of the five phases of return to in-person worship and activities at Center Grove and other potential restrictions that may be applicable during that phase. Please note that we will progress to each of these phases when there has been an appropriate window of continuing decrease in new cases and/or COVID-19 related deaths as defined by the Alabama Department of Public Health and/or other government officials. However, COVID-19 is an ever-changing issue and we may, at times, have to move back and forth between phases.

Phase No.	Maximum No. of Attendees	Other Restrictions/Notes
1	15 <i>*attendees limited to those participating in the service</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All church services & meetings held virtually • Participants in virtual service (i.e., pastor, worship liturgist) may be present in sanctuary in-person • Attendees must observe social distancing rules and wear masks • Contact tracing measures may be taken • Temperature checks via touchless forehead thermometers may be required for admittance
2	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited attendance at in-person Sunday service • Virtual services still available • Social distancing and masks required (those living in the same home may sit together) • All other church meetings and activities will continue to be held virtually • Reservations (“RSVP”) may become necessary for in-person attendees • Contact tracing measures may be taken • Temperature checks via touchless forehead thermometers may be required for admittance
3	65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited attendance at in-person Sunday service • Reservations (“RSVP”) may become necessary for in-person attendees • Virtual services still available • Social distancing and masks required (those living in the same home may sit together) • All other church meetings and activities will continue to be held virtually • Depending on attendance, a second in-person Sunday service may become available

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funerals & weddings may resume but must follow the same attendance restrictions and safety protocols as Sunday service; additional sanitation of the building may be required • Contact tracing measures may be taken • Temperature checks via touchless forehead thermometers may be required for admittance
4	85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as Phase 3, above, plus in-person Bible Study and meetings may resume; social distancing and masks required
5	TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “new normal” • In-person and virtual services available • TBD

II. WHEN SHOULD I RETURN?

It is virtually impossible to determine who will contract COVID-19 and how it may impact those people. However, the Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”) has identified certain groups of people who may be more likely to become severely ill if they contract COVID-19. “Severely ill” is defined as hospitalization, admission to the ICU, intubation or mechanical ventilation, or death.

Those at higher risk of becoming severely ill include “older adults” and “people with medical conditions.” While “older adults” previously referred to those age 65 or older, the CDC now simply says that your risk for severe illness increases with age (*i.e.*, someone in their 50s is at greater risk than someone in their 40s, but lower risk than someone in their 60s). Similarly, as the medical community learns more about COVID-19, the list of underlying medical conditions that puts persons at higher risk grows each day. A list is included below for reference, but this list is not exhaustive. According to the CDC, adults of any age with underlying medical conditions are at an increased risk of severe illness from the virus.²

² More information about Persons At Higher Risk can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>.

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD
- Heart conditions
- Immunocompromised
- Obesity
- Pregnancy
- Sickle cell disease
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Cerebrovascular disease
- Cystic fibrosis
- Hypertension
- Neurologic conditions like dementia
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Thalassemia

Center Grove cannot determine which phase is best for your return – that is a personal decision you must prayerfully make. If you are at higher risk, we ask you to be mindful of your vulnerabilities and consider delaying your in-person return so as to maximize your safety. While we will have sanitizing and physical distancing measures in place, we cannot 100% guarantee non-exposure.

Please note that if you have recently tested positive for COVID-19 or experienced any symptoms of COVID-19 (*i.e.*, coughing, fever, loss of taste or smell, difficulty breathing, etc.) you should NOT return to in-person activities at Center Grove for fourteen (14) consecutive days or until you have received a negative COVID-19 test result.

III. EXECUTING SAFETY PRIORITIES

During in-person worship and activities, Center Grove will engage in a rigorous protocol to ensure the physical premises are kept clean and sanitized. This protocol includes:

A. Cleaning/Sanitizing

- The church will be cleaned using products certified to kill viruses, including COVID-19.
- Touchless hand sanitizing stations will be placed at each entrance to the church and in/near restrooms.

- Automatic Intermittent Sanitizing Misters will be installed in restrooms to ensure they are kept clean while the building is in use.
- Water fountains will not be available for use.
- Sanitizing products will be purchased and kept in stock for sanitizing the areas of the church that are in use.

B. Requiring Social Distancing & Personal Protective Gear

- Face masks will be required for entry into the church and must cover the mouth and nose. Those refusing to comply with the mask requirement will be denied entry or asked to exit.
- Face masks will be made available for volunteers and attendees.
- Cloth masks are recommended.
- Gloves will be worn by volunteers responsible for monitoring, cleaning/sanitizing, and handling offering envelopes/money.
- Social distancing of at least six feet must be maintained between persons from separate households throughout the building.
- Touchless forehead thermometers will be used to take the temperature of those entering the church building. Anyone with a temperature above 100°F will not be permitted to enter the building.
- *Please see the infographic from Johns Hopkins Medicine, included and linked in Section VIII below, for more information about proper usage of face masks.*

C. Safety Signage

- Reminding people not to shake hands or share hugs.

- Reminding congregation to social distance at least six feet apart unless within the same household.
- Requesting everyone to minimize use of rooms outside the sanctuary, including the restrooms.
- Reminding everyone to wash and sanitize hands often, such as when exiting the restroom.
- Reminding everyone of which doors to use for entrance and exit.

D. Contact Tracing

Every effort will be made to collect contact information from anyone attending in-person activities at the church so that they can be informed of potential COVID-19 exposure. In case of such an instance, contact will be made by the SPRC team and may be by telephone, email, or other general public notice.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the greatest extent possible while still permitting Center Grove to notify those necessary of any potential exposure.

If you experience any symptoms or discover you have been exposed near the time you have attended an in-person activity at Center Grove, we ask that you immediately contact the SPRC team so that proper precautions can be taken.

E. Primary Areas That Will Be Regularly Sanitized

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| • Vestibule | • Choir Room |
| • Sanctuary | • Bridal Room |
| • Restrooms | • Office Suites |

**Please note that the entire church will be kept clean as usual, this non-exhaustive list refers to areas of particular focus during phased return. Areas will be added to this list as the church opens further.*

F. Reserving a Space for In-Person Sunday Service

Depending on our specific needs, it may become necessary for those wishing to worship in-person to RSVP prior to service to ensure we do not exceed our current capacity. If so, a reservation will be required for entry into the physical building. Otherwise, available seating will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

IV. MAINTAINING COMMUNICATION

During the early phases of our plan, most of us will still primarily be worshipping virtually. We hope to stay connected and will communicate as follows:

- Weekly “What’s Happening at CG?” emails;
- Announcements before and during virtual services;
- Telephone calls using an auto-dialer (*i.e.*, All Call) or phone tree;
- On Facebook & YouTube @ Center Grove United Methodist Church; and/or
- Through the church website at www.centergroveumc.org.

If you do not receive our weekly emails and would like to have your email address added to our listserv, please call or email the church office.

V. NECESSARY CHANGES TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP

In order to maintain proper social distancing and minimize potential exposure to in-person attendees, we will need to make certain changes to our usual in-person worship service. This may include, but is not limited to:

A. **Physical Changes to the Sanctuary**

The Trustees will adjust the seating as needed in the sanctuary for each phase to ensure proper social distancing. We will attempt to accommodate family needs where possible. To help slow potential spread from touching shared surfaces, it may be necessary to remove Bibles, hymnals and offering envelopes from the sanctuary as well. You are, of course, welcome to bring your own personal items with you for in-person service. Scriptures and hymns may be visible on the screens in the sanctuary for in-person attendees.

B. **Tithes, Offering or Other Giving**


Giving will be available during in-person worship thanks to our Ushers and other volunteers. Please follow the directions provided during service. However, we encourage you to use one of our no-contact methods of giving:

(1) Church Website

Once at www.centergroveumc.org, click the “Give” tab and then click “give now”

(2) UMCGo App

Available on both Apple and Android devices (visit the Apple App Store or Google Play Store).

Click the heart  to give and search for “Center Grove” at 2969 State Rte 53 Huntsville

(3) By Mail

Center Grove United Methodist Church
P.O. Box 5957
Huntsville, AL 35819

(4) Text-to-Give

Text (844) 944 – 2817 and follow the prompts on your phone

(5) Drive-Thru Drop Off

Physical drop off days will be announced online and during church services.

C. Holy Communion

For virtual attendees, Communion elements will be available for drive-through pick up the day before the first Sunday of each month from 11:00am – 12:00 pm (noon). Those unable to pick up elements may use bread and juice they have available at home. Communion elements will be handed out in individually sealed bags by a volunteer wearing both gloves and a mask.

For in-person attendees, Communion elements will similarly be individually sealed and handed out during service by volunteers wearing both gloves and a mask. We ask that you minimally lift your mask as needed to permit you to consume the Communion elements and immediately re-secure your mask in place. Your face should remain covered during all spoken portions of Communion. We will not collect used Communion element containers, please take them with you and dispose of them in the designated trash receptacle on your way out the door or at home.

D. Entrance and Exit from the Building

According to health officials, COVID-19 is primarily spread from person to person through respiratory droplets released into the air. Because fresh air is constantly moving and helps disperse these droplets, you are less likely to be exposed if outdoors. For these reasons, we ask that you promptly exit the building following any in-person service or activity. Socializing outdoors (while still socially distancing and preferably wearing masks) will help to reduce the risk of infection. It also will permit staff to more quickly begin sanitizing the church following in-person activity.

To reduce surface contact and ensure efficiency, we may limit which entrances and exits can be used during in-person activities. Clear signage will be used where needed. It may also be necessary to keep doors locked (from the outside) during certain activities to ensure proper protocols are met. If you ever have difficulty accessing the church, please contact the church office or a member of our leadership team.

E. Children & Youth Ministries

Based on your feedback in the Church Reopening Survey, Children's Church will not be available until further notice. The Children and Youth Ministries will continue to meet virtually. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of our coordinators for these ministries (contact information available through the church office).

F. Classes, Bible Studies, Meetings & Small Groups

No classes, Bible studies, meetings or other small groups will be permitted to meet at the church until Phase 4 of reopening. All social distancing and other protocols must be met at that time. Our various ministries and groups will continue to meet virtually or by phone until Phase 4. To get connected with the coordinator for any specific ministry, please contact our church office.

Our "Wednesday in the Word" Bible study is available to stream online weekly via Facebook or YouTube by searching for Center Grove United Methodist Church.

G. Special Events

While it was a difficult decision, after considering the health guidelines, we have decided that funerals and weddings will not be permitted until Phase 3 of reopening. The same guidelines must be met as for in-person Sunday service, including attendance limits, social distancing, and mask requirements. Other special events (*i.e., events held at but not sponsored by the church*) are not recommended and likely will not be approved - absent extenuating circumstances – until Phase 5 of reopening.

H. Praise Team, Choirs & Musicians

The Praise Team, choirs and musicians will continue to serve in the Music Ministry during all phases of reopening. However, the number of participants will be reduced so as to permit proper protocols. For example, no more than 12 persons may be in the choir stand at a time and participants will remain socially

distanced. Participants will also wear a mask except when singing. Any choir rehearsals must be held in the sanctuary choir stand while observing the same protocols required for in-person services. Microphones, instruments that remain at the church and other equipment will be regularly sanitized.

VI. STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

We understand that concerns about exposure and the necessary precautions discussed above will likely impact our ordinarily generous pool of volunteers. Center Grove truly appreciates all those willing to volunteer in any capacity during our phased return to in-person services. Numerous volunteer opportunities will be available and posted through our various communication platforms (*see* Section IV).

Despite our best efforts to reduce exposure, Center Grove cannot make any safety guarantees to persons attending or participating in in-person services or activities. We ask that you review the information in Section II (“When Should I Return”), other information available from health agencies, and consult with your physician (if necessary) when deciding whether to volunteer and in what capacity. We understand that this is a very difficult personal decision and we respect each person’s choice without judgment. Center Grove is thankful for you whether you volunteer or not!

As with in-person services attendees, any staff member or volunteer who is sick, has symptoms, or has reason to think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 must not physically return to Center Grove for fourteen (14) days or until they have received a negative COVID-19 test result.

VII. IN CASE OF EXPOSURE OR EMERGENCY

We sincerely hope this is never necessary, but if Center Grove learns that someone who has been in the church tests positive for COVID-19 or becomes ill with related symptoms, the following procedures will be followed:³

³ The CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>.

- Initiate contact tracing and notify all necessary persons so they may quarantine and/or be tested for COVID-19;
- Immediately cancel all upcoming activities and close the building for a thorough cleaning (including disinfecting);
- Contact local health officials and coordinate with them as necessary; and
- Meet with the appropriate leadership team(s) to determine next steps for a potential extended closure of, or limited access to, the facility.

VIII. EXAMPLES OF PROPER MASK USAGE⁴

FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES TO PROPERLY WEAR YOUR FACE MASK



Wash your hands before and after touching the mask.



Touch only the bands or ties when putting on and taking off your mask.



Make sure the mask fits to cover your nose, mouth and chin. If you adjust the mask to cover those areas, wash your hands before and after.



Make sure you can breathe and talk comfortably through your mask.



Wash reusable masks after each use. If the mask is disposable, discard it when visibly soiled or damaged.

⁴ Infographic and other information available online from Johns Hopkins Medicine at <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/proper-mask-wearing-coronavirus-prevention-infographic>.

TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS, AVOID THESE COMMON MASK-WEARING MISTAKES



We do not recommend wearing bandanas, gaiters or masks with exhalation valves as face coverings.



Don't touch your or your child's mask while it is being worn.



Don't wear the mask under your chin with your nose and mouth exposed.



Don't leave your nose or mouth uncovered.



Don't remove the mask while around others in public.



Don't share your mask with family members or friends.