



**RE-LAUNCH PLANS IN RESPONSE
TO COVID-19
Phase 3.0**

As of April 20, 2021
St. James United Methodist Church
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Little Rock AR
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Introduction

On March 12, 2020 St. James United Methodist Church took the precaution of canceling all services, programs, meetings, and groups on-campus. What we hoped would be a few short weeks has now lasted more than five months. The Coronavirus continues to impact the entire world and the spread is not slowing down.

As we live into this new normal, the church leadership has discussed, prayed, and struggled with how to fulfill our mission of *To Know Jesus Christ and to Make Him Known* and to continue to live out our core values.

During this time, our worship services have gone to exclusively online through Live Streaming, Facebook Live, and rebroadcast of services. Our worship attendance has actually increased! Our summer attendance remains above 1,000 per weekend where usually our summer average is below 700 --- What a blessing! -- This demonstrates that the church is the people and we can worship anywhere at any time. That is not to say that we do not miss being together in our sacred spaces. Nothing can replace the spiritual fulfillment of worshipping together with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In March, the Church Council formed a Relaunch Task Force. Members of this task force are: Brad Sweeney, chair of Church Council; Kevin Keith, chair of Finance; Lee Sing, chair of Staff Parish; Julie Luther-Kelso, chair of Board of Trustees; Don Bacon, Chancellor; Bill Waddell, Lay Leader; Dr. Scott Stern, Medical Professional; Kim Anderson, Executive Director of Ministries; Gayle Bohannon, Church Administrator; Rev. Greg Schick, Rev. Claire Caldwell and Rev. Carness Vaughan.

This taskforce has surveyed the congregation on two different occasions, had private conversations with many church members, closely monitored the guidance from Bishop Mueller and the Governor, prayed together, and struggled with how to best be the church known as St. James. The work has not been easy. The work is not complete and will not be complete for some time. Through their efforts, this document has been prepared. Due to the changing circumstances of our day-to-day lives, the guidelines are designed to be adaptable and responsive to those changes.

As you read this plan, please keep in mind our mission is *To Know Jesus Christ and to Make Him Known*. Our first core value is to *Start with love and grace*. We are striving to fulfil our mission, extend love and grace, and be a part of solving problems – not adding to the problems of our community.

The Relaunch Plan was approved by the task force on August 5, 2020
Approved by the Board of Trustees on August 13, 2020
Approved by the Church Council on August 13, 2020
Reviewed by the District Superintendent on August 6, 2020

Updated General Information

In October of 2020, the Relaunch Team recommended that limited in-person worship resume. The initial limit was 75 people at each service, face coverings required, reservations required, check-in required, and social distancing observed. This process went well, although neither service reached the full 75 participation cap. Due to the rising numbers of COVID cases in Arkansas and especially Pulaski County, the in-person worship was suspended in December.

January 2021 the State of Arkansas was able to begin administering vaccines to citizens. St. James continued to comply with the guidelines set forth by the Arkansas Conference and the State of Arkansas.

The Relaunch Team continued to meet and evaluate the best ways to fulfill our mission in the safest and most caring manner. Upon the recommendation of the Relaunch Team, the Board of Trustees approved that in-person worship and limited small groups be allowed to start meeting in-person as of February 20. The limit for worship is 100 per venue. Small groups are limited by the size of the meeting room. All safety precautions remain in effect.

Since January, vaccines are being administered, number of new cases are lowering each week, and the number of hospitalizations is finally coming down as well. It appears that the fight to contain this deadly virus is succeeding. Thus, the Relaunch Team is recommending the following updates to the Relaunch Plan.

Disclaimer on changes/updates

Due to the nature of the Coronavirus and the current rising rate of cases, this plan will be revised as necessary. This may include:

- Suspending in-person worship
- Suspending all on-campus meetings or programs
- Suspending office hours or requiring remote work for appropriate staff.

What would cause these actions to take place? It is impossible to predict how long this pandemic will last, if the virus will change, or if infection rates will continue to rise. Our goal is to provide a safe, healthy environment for all using reasonable measures and with the best interests of the church as a whole in mind. If it is felt that we cannot provide a safe environment changes will be mandated. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Staff Member in a position that requires personal contact with members who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past fourteen (14) days.
- Participant in worship or on-campus activity tests positive for COVID-19
- Positive cases of COVID-19 in Pulaski County that are greater than 10% of total tests for seven straight days
- Directives from the Governor
- Directives from Bishop Mueller/Arkansas Annual Conference
- Inability to procure proper cleaning/sanitizing products

- Observation of unforeseen issues that endanger those attending worship or on-campus activities
- Disregard of protective measures required by the relaunch plan

**General Expectations for all Ministries,
Spring and Summer 2021**

St. James United Methodist Church will continue to follow the guidance provided by the Arkansas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, various departments of the State of Arkansas government, and the CDC. As a part of the United Methodist Connection, we will give priority to the directives of the bishop of the Arkansas Annual Conference. With this in mind, the following actions are required for all ministries, volunteers, employees and guests at St. James.

1. Face coverings must be worn upon entering the building and while in common areas of the church (hallways, Sanctuary, Worship Center, Mission Café, and rest rooms.
2. Social distancing guidelines will be followed as recommended by the CDC. As of March 23, 2021 the recommended social distancing is 3 feet with the exception of worship which shall remain at six feet.
3. Groups meeting in-person, whether at the church or off-site as an acknowledged group of St. James, should observe face coverings and social distancing guidelines at all times.
4. There shall be no unscheduled meetings or groups at this time. Any ministry, group, or individuals wishing to meet in-person at St. James must schedule their meeting through the Executive Administrative Assistant (217-6711 or teresa@stjameslr.org). This is to ensure that rooms are set up with proper social distancing, sanitization/cleaning is done properly and timely, and to facilitate contact tracing in the event a person in the group tests positive for COVID-19.
5. Any events involving children, youth or protected persons must follow the Safe Sanctuary Policy of St. James.

Worship Services

As of April 11, 2021 the maximum number of individuals for a service will be 200 individuals. The following must be observed:

1. Reservations required
2. Face coverings required
3. Social distancing of 6 ft is required.
4. No paper bulletins.
5. Temperature checks and check-ins will continued to be required.
6. Ushers will continue to guide worship participates to seats to ensure social distancing is observed. This includes both entering and exiting each venue.

Time limits on the length of service will be removed.

Communion

When communion is offered in worship, pre-packaged juice and wafers will be provided. Ushers will provide guidance on when to proceed forward to receive communion. Social distancing must be observed. The kneeling rail will remain closed until further notice.

Bulletins, Hymnals, Pew Bibles

We will not be providing bulletins, hymnals, pew Bibles, or paper items. Screens have been installed in the Sanctuary so that bulletins, music, scriptures, videos, and announcement may be viewed. You may also download the bulletin through the link on the church's website or Facebook page.

Offering

Offering plates will not be passed during the worship services. There will be a collection box to receive your gifts at the end of the service, near the exit doors. We encourage all to continue to support the mission and ministry of St. James through regular, faithful giving. Gifts can be mailed to the church, given on-line, electronic funds transfer, and text-to-give (501.222.4613).

Congregational Singing/Passing of the Peace

Following the guidelines of the Arkansas Annual Conference, congregational singing will be allowed only if social distancing is observed and everyone singing is wearing a face covering¹. Additionally, there will be no passing of the peace. We strongly urge everyone to maintain social distance. Handshakes, fist bumps, hugs, or touching of anyone outside of your immediate family are prohibited.

¹ This plan was approved on August 13, 2020

On August 14 the Arkansas Annual Conference released a statement allowing congregational singing if social distancing is observed and face coverings are worn by all singers.

Nursery

Nursery care will be provided for worship services and for volunteers serving in other areas on Sunday morning. Reservations for childcare will be required. Childcare will not be provided for small group gatherings other than Sunday morning.

Weddings/Funerals

Weddings and funerals will be limited to 200 people or less. All of the standard procedures listed above for Sunday worship are to be followed (exception being reservations). These must be scheduled with a pastor in coordination with the Executive Administrative Assistant (217.6711, teresa@stjameslr.org)

Baptisms

Baptisms should be scheduled with a pastor in advance. They may be conducted during an in-person worship service. They may also be recorded in advance and included in the live-stream service. Contact the Executive Assistant for information and scheduling.

Volunteers/Staff

Individuals whether volunteering or employees of St. James are required to continue wearing face coverings and practicing social distancing.

MINISTRY AREAS

This section of the Relaunch Plan goes into effect immediately upon approval of the Board of Trustees and the Church Council.

Adult Small Groups and Sunday School Classes

Sunday School classes are encouraged to meet via video conference, in-person or use a hybrid model at this time. If a group does wish to meet in-person, a request must be submitted to Rev. Claire Caldwell (or the designated staff person). St. James will assign appropriate rooms, entrances, and meeting time so that social distancing guidelines can be followed. We do ask that groups take attendance either through the Shelby Next App or by emailing an attendance list to claire@stjameslr.org.

Adult Bible Studies, Prayer Groups, UMW, and other small groups may meet in-person at the church provided group is less than 50 people and appropriate space is available. Groups must contact either the Executive Assistant or Rev. Caldwell (or the designated staff person) to arrange room, time, and review the general expectations. Note: Due to social distancing guidelines, you will be assigned a room to meet in that fits the size of your group. It may or may not be the room you were in prior to COVID-19. We do ask that groups take attendance either through the Shelby Next App or by emailing an attendance list to claire@stjameslr.org

Refreshments will be allowed if provided by the group and individually packaged.

Following the recommendations of the CDC, extremely small groups (10 people or less) are able to remove masks provided that everyone in the room has been vaccinated and social distancing is still observed. This will be re-evaluated on a regular basis following any changes in the CDC guidelines.

Care Ministries

Support Groups, classes, and non-related groups (AA, NA, Al-Anon) may also meet in-person as long as the general requirements above are followed. Groups must request to meet in-person and schedule through the Executive Administrative Assistant. Attendance shall be taken and reported to the Executive Assistant.

Child Enrichment Ministries

The Learning Center and Kids LIFE programs have been in operation since June 1, 2020. They will continue their programming following the guidelines of Arkansas Department of Human Services and Department of Health Guidelines. Face coverings for adults will continue to be required until further notice.

Children's Programming

Sunday School and mid-week program may resume. Participation is limited by the number of people who can fit into a space while maintaining the required social distancing. Children ages 4 and older as well as all adult volunteers are required to wear face coverings.

Vacation Bible School

Sean Dunbar has put together a plan for in-person VBS. It will be limited to 200 people or as space allows. Adults will attend with their children and will sit together as family units. Social distancing will be observed, adults will be required to wear face coverings, and families will be seated together and possibly with another family that is in their social "bubble."

Youth Ministry

Sunday School

Youth Sunday School may be in-person, virtual, or a hybrid. Adults and teens are required to wear face coverings. Registration is recommended. Social distancing is required. Attendance must be taken and entered in to the church database.

Sunday Night and Mid-Week Programming

Plans for in-person gatherings whether on campus or off should be planned carefully. All of the general expectations must be followed. Any food served must be pre-packaged and individual portions.

Off Campus Events

These must also be planned carefully to ensure safety protocols are maintained. The Executive Director of Ministries must be notified of any off campus events and the event scheduled on the church calendar.

Hospitality (Food Services)

St. James will continue the practice of no water fountains until further notice.

Coffee/snacks will not be provided on Sunday mornings or for other group meetings.

In general, food service for any event will be strongly discouraged. Food service requests must be received by the Director of Hospitality and approved by the Executive Director of Ministries prior to the event being placed on the church calendar.

Missions

The work of the church outside of the walls has been critical during this time and has not been stopped by the pandemic. We appreciate the leaders of various mission projects following the general expectations. Any mission project that wishes to meet on campus, must first contact Brenda Weeks, Director of Missions. Requirements for participation in mission activities shall be consistent with the requirements of this relaunch plan, including the recording of those persons participating and their addresses and telephone numbers in the event that contact tracing is necessary.

Music Ministry

Large vocal choirs for adults, youth, or groups will not meet at this time. Small ensembles may sing together so long as the general guidelines are followed. The size of the ensemble is limited to the number of people who sit in the choir loft while maintaining 6 feet social distancing. Face coverings will be required except when singing. The Director of Music, Worship and the Arts will approve any ensemble groups. Practices times will be placed on the church calendar and maintenance notified.

Children's music ministry may resume in September 2021.

Handbell choirs for youth and adults may continue. Practice may not exceed 60 minutes and face coverings must be worn at all times. Social distancing will be observed.

Instrumentalists may be a part of a worship service provided social distancing and safety precautions are taken. It is the responsibility of the Director of Music, Worship, and the Arts to ensure that the most current protocols from the Arkansas Conference and music experts are followed.

Praise Bands (youth and adults) must observe social distancing of 6 feet. Face coverings must be worn except when speaking or singing.

Outside Groups and Special Events

In general, and with the exception of Care Ministries noted above, outside groups are not allowed to use our facility at this time. Requests may be received by the Executive Administrative Assistant. Any exception to this policy will be determined by the Executive Staff Team on a case by case basis.

Recreation Ministries

At this time all sports that involve close contact (basketball, volleyball, soccer, etc.) are not allowed. If participants in a sporting or recreational activity can follow the social distancing guidelines and participants wear face coverings, then they may request to meet. Each request will be reviewed by a member of the Executive Staff Team for approval. Requirements for participation in sporting or recreational activities shall be consistent with the requirements of this relaunch plan, including the recording of those persons participating and their addresses and telephone numbers in the event that contact tracing is necessary. This will remain in effect until further notice.

Senior Adult Ministry

Due to our seniors being in the vulnerable category, we recommend that ministries by senior adults be conducted via video conference or other online platform. If a group wishes to meet in-person, please contact Jenny Smith and she will coordinate the event with the Executive Assistant as appropriate and with requirements for participation that are consistent with the church's relaunch plan.

Moving Forward

The progress that has been made in curbing this pandemic in the last sixty days has been an answer to prayer. We continue to monitor weekly the active case load in Pulaski County, the vaccination rate in the state and county as well as governmental guidelines. Within the next few weeks the Relaunch team will be developing some new metrics that will determine possible next steps (related to social distancing measures, face covering requirements, etc.) in a timely manner.

In the Event of Exposure

Anyone who has been on-campus or involved in a church activity off campus and either tests positive or has close contact with someone who tests positive within the past 14 days, shall notify the church immediately. The report should be made to either Kim Anderson, Executive Director of Ministries or Gayle Bohannon, Church Administrator.

In order to facilitate the notification process, St. James will begin asking members if they have been fully vaccinated as they register for events. This information will be used only if necessary for contact tracing.

Notification to the church body of exposure by a person participating in a church activity will be made by either Gayle Bohannon or Kim Anderson as appropriate. The place/time/nature of exposure will depend specifics of the situation. Each exposure event will be handled on a case-by-case basis. For example: If one youth reported a second hand exposure to COVID-19, we would follow the Arkansas Health Department guidelines for notification. If someone tested positive and attended a worship service, everyone in that service would be notified. Except as required for determining contact with a person who tested positive or to effectively facilitate or conduct contact tracing, the privacy of persons who have tested positive shall be maintained.