

“The Return”

A Re-Entry Plan for On Campus Gatherings at Royston First United Methodist Church

On March 14, 2020, the Leadership Team of Royston First United Methodist Church made the unanimous decision to close the church campus following the advice of state officials, the Georgia Department of Public Health, and the North Georgia Conference bishop and cabinet. Since that time, the church campus has remained closed for gatherings, programs, events, and meetings. The following is a proposed plan to re-open the church campus beginning June 22, 2020, and includes guidelines for reopening along with best practices. This plan may be modified at any time by the Leadership Team of Royston First United Methodist Church, and will allow for limited use of the facilities through Monday, August 31, 2020.

General Information

Re-opening Date

The church campus will officially re-open on Monday, June 22, 2020. Upon re-opening, all meetings, group gatherings (including Sunday School classes), and ministries will need to reserve rooms for use through the church office. We request that no groups of 2 or more enter the building without the advanced knowledge of the church office. This is for the protection of all people who utilize the facilities.

When discussing re-opening of the church campus in a post-COVID world, we need to throw out our old way of thinking about church and think about what is best for our congregation, best for our community, and best for our mission as a church. We are not focused on trying to re-establish normal – we may have to accept a new “normal”

As gatherings resume on campus, all gatherings will be limited in size according to recommendations of CDC and Public Health Department. Extra time will need to be provided between gatherings to allow people to leave the campus and for areas to be sanitized. Those in most at-risk groups may be encouraged to stay at home.

Cleaning

The safety of all those who use the facility is important. All groups will be requested and expected to clean each room used after the scheduled time of use. A checklist for cleaning procedures, proper cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE) will be provided by the church. If you suspect any supplies are running low, we ask that you notify the church office immediately. Failure to maintain proper cleaning resources may result in a temporary closure of the facilities.

Social Distancing Practices

Hand Sanitizer Stations: There will be hand sanitizer stations provided throughout the facility. Everyone is encouraged to wash their hands thoroughly with anti-bacterial soap as the primary method for cleaning hands. Hand sanitizer stations will be located outside the bathrooms and in gathering areas near the door ways.

Face Masks: All individuals over the age of 5 are expected to wear a face mask while in the building for the protection of others. Children between the ages of 2-4 are encouraged to wear a mask, if possible. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a face mask.

The Department of Health encourages the use of face masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. We want to create environments that promote love for our neighbor and a safe place for all to gather. Face masks do not need to be N95 standard masks; any cloth covering will suffice. Masks should cover both the mouth and the nose. If an individual entering the building does not have a mask, a mask will be provided.

Contact Tracing: Upon entering the building, all individuals will need to be recorded as being present for the program, event, or meeting they are attending. We request that one volunteer be designated to record attendance. Attendance sheets will be provided by the church office and should be returned to the church office ASAP. Records of attendance will be kept on file in the church office for 21 days. In the event of a possible outbreak, those in attendance will be notified immediately.

Physical Distancing: We ask that everyone maintain six feet of space between any individual who is not an immediate member of your own household. This includes no hugging or shaking hands. Individuals are encouraged to wave, offer an “air high-five,” or a courteous head nod.

Restrooms: Restroom use is for emergency only and we ask that you limit the use of the bathroom to one person at a time. Exceptions will be made for parents with children or caretakers of vulnerable adults. We ask that individuals continue to wear their mask in the restroom and properly wash their hands before they leave the restroom.

Shared Food and Beverage: There will be no shared food or beverage on the church campus at this time. Individuals are permitted to bring their own food or beverage, but we ask that you refrain from sharing with others.

Parking: If possible, we request for individuals to continue social distance practices in the parking lot. This includes, but may not be limited to, no gatherings that do not observe the 6 foot rule and parking in every other spot. Those who are physically able are asked to park farther out to leave closer spots for those with limited mobility.

Volunteers

All staff and volunteers will be screened prior to all events, programs, meetings, and gatherings on campus (including our weekly worship). Staff and volunteers should wear proper protection and maintain physical distancing at all times. Anyone handling money should wear gloves while handling money. Anyone using cleaning supplies should use recommended PPE while cleaning.

Limited Access to Building

Access to areas within the building will be limited. Room requests and reservations should be made by contacting the church office. Please allow at least 3-5 days for scheduling.

While in the building, we request that groups remain in the room to which they have been assigned. This limits the need to clean all areas of the building after a group meets.

Worship

Worship Times

From June 28 through at least August 30, there will be two worship services at 9:30 and 11:00. The 9:30 service will be a contemporary service in the gym and the 11:00 service will be a traditional service in the Sanctuary. Seating will be limited due to implementation of physical distancing measures. The pastor and staff may add additional services if it is determined to be necessary.

On June 28, there will be overflow seating available in the Fellowship Hall where the virtual service will be shown on a large screen.

The worship services will be shortened to 45 minutes with a simplified order of worship.

Virtual Service

An online worship service will continue to be available for those who are unable to attend worship in-person on Sunday mornings. The online worship service will continue to premiere at 10:15 AM each Sunday. The pastor and staff may change this time, if necessary.

Capacity Limit

As of June 16, 2020, the state of Georgia prohibits gatherings of 50 or more where physical distancing of 6 feet cannot be maintained. While there is no stated capacity on how many can attend each worship service, we believe we can accommodate up to about 90 people in the Gym and up to about 75 people in the Sanctuary. Actual capacity will vary based on seating of families in the same household.

Congregational Singing

Based on recommendations of the health department, choral societies, the North Georgia Conference, and various religious leadership organizations, congregational singing is not recommended as a part of our worship at this time. There will be no Chancel Choir in the 11:00 service.

This does not mean there will be no music. Our music ministry staff will work to provide soloists and instrumental music that can be offered in a safe way. The congregation is discouraged of singing with a mask and/or humming.

Entering and Exiting the Worship Service

Doors will open 30 minutes prior to the beginning of each worship service. We ask that everyone remain in their cars until the doors open. Upon entering the building, greeters will welcome you and register each individual and family. We are asking everyone to wear a mask while inside the building.

Once an individual or family has been registered, they may proceed to the door to the worship space where an usher will show them to a seat. Please wait to be seated and follow the directional arrows on the floor. Seating has been sectioned off in each worship space to accommodate 6 feet of physical distancing. Everyone is asked to sit where the usher directs and please remain with his or her family.

During the service, the doors to the worship space will remain open to allow for maximum air circulation in the building.

At the end of the worship service, ushers will direct the congregation on how to exit the worship space. Please wait for an usher to direct you and remain seated until that time. Once the usher has invited you to exit the worship space, please follow the directional arrows and proceed out of the building and directly to your car.

Avoiding Shared Contact Points

During the worship service, there will be some changes that will be made to the order of worship. There will be no greeting time, no passing of offering plates/baskets, no use of hymnals and/or pew Bibles, no pew pads for attendance, and no pens/pencils available. We ask everyone to bring their own Bible, along with a pen or pencil, to church on Sunday morning.

If someone does not have a Bible and would like to borrow one from the church, we will be glad to allow a Bible to be “checked out” from the church. The Bible will be taken home each week and brought back to the church by the individual. A similar practice will be implemented with hymnals if an individual would like to have a hymnal to follow along with music.

There will be no printed bulletins at this time. Bulletins will be available digitally and e-mailed out on Friday with the weekly e-mail from the church office. Members of the congregation are encouraged to print the bulletin at home and bring it with them.

In place of a pew pad or attendance sheet, the congregation will be encouraged to complete a digital connect card using their smart phones or tablets. The digital connect card will be shared in all worship services – including the online service.

Communion

While details about how to administer the Sacrament of Holy Communion are being discussed, we will not be providing Communion by intinction (dipping the bread in a common cup). We will either be using pre-packaged Communion elements, or we will find a safe way to provide individual wafers and cups to everyone.

Offering

The best option for receiving our offering each week continues to be online giving or text giving. Because this is not an option that everyone is comfortable with at this time, we will provide baskets at the doors to the worship spaces where offering can be received. An usher will remain at the doors at all times with the basket. The congregation will be asked to place their offering directly into the basket. There will be no passing of plates/baskets during the service.

After each worship service, two ushers will collect the offering from the baskets in the room. Volunteers are asked to wear gloves and a face mask any time they are handling money.

Food and Beverage

There will be no food or beverage provided before, during, or after any worship service (with the exception of when the Sacrament of Holy Communion is administered). Members of the congregation are welcome to bring their own coffee and snacks into the building, but we ask that you refrain from sharing with others.

Family Worship

Children are important to our church and our worship experience. Until a plan is developed that will allow for children to participate in children's church in a safe way, we are inviting our children to worship with their families. Worship bags will be available for children to use during the service. We ask that parents please take the bag and the contents of the bag home with you at the end of the service.

Nursery will resume when it is determined to be safe for children.

During the worship service, Heather Woods will continue to provide a children's moment either virtually or from the front of the room while children remain with their parents.

Small Groups

Adult small groups (including Sunday School classes, Bible studies, UMW circles, and more) may begin meeting on the church campus beginning June 29. While we cannot safely accommodate all groups during their regular meeting times, we will make the best effort to honor times for group meetings.

All groups will be asked to meet in the Fellowship Hall and to schedule their group meeting through the church office at least 3-5 days in advance. We ask that individuals and groups please refrain from being in the building without approval of the church office. Groups are

asked to remain in the Fellowship Hall, unless using the bathrooms. Bathroom use should be limited to one person at a time, for emergency only.

All participants in group meetings on the church campus will be expected to adhere to the physical distancing guidelines of the church as stated in these guidelines.

A record of all attendees will be documented and submitted to the church office to allow for contact tracing in the event of a positive test within the group. The maximum suggested capacity for all groups will be 25 people.

Children and Youth

We are continuing to develop plans for children and youth to resume in-person gatherings. With any plan, the health and safety of our children is our top priority.

All children and youth ministry in-person events planned before August 30 will be presented before the church's Leadership Team.

Preschool

The preschool board is working with the preschool director to develop a plan to safely resume in-person teaching beginning August 10. This plan will be presented and approved by the church's Leadership Team at a later date.

Special Events/Gatherings

All special events or non-church related gatherings on the church campus will require the approval of the church's Leadership Team. This includes but is not limited to weddings, funerals, baby showers, family reunions, birthday parties, and events for individuals, families, and community organizations.

All gatherings will be limited to a maximum capacity of 25 attendees and full adherence to the physical distancing practices of the church will be required. All parties will be asked to wear masks (with the exception of those leading weddings or funerals, and the wedding party).

Any group that plans to use the facility will be required to meet with Julie Lewis prior to using the facility to review guidelines and cleaning procedures. It is the responsibility of the group to clean the facility properly after use of the facility.

Off-Site Gatherings

Individuals and groups are permitted to meet off-site as they wish. The church leadership can make recommendations for off-site gatherings, but it is the responsibility of the host/convener to enforce the recommended guidelines. We ask that any individual or group who meets off-site in any official capacity of the church continue to adhere to the physical distancing guidelines included in this document.

Church Office Operations

The church office will continue to be open for appointments only on Monday and Thursday from 9 AM-3 PM. Visitors to the church office are asked to wear a mask. Church staff will be wearing masks when visitors are in the office. There will be no in office visits. All office communication will take place in a walk-up manner at the doorway of Julie Lewis' office.

Pastoral Care Visits

Pastoral care visits to hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and homes will continue to be suspended at this time. The preferred method for pastoral care will be phone calls.

COVID-19 Shut Down Plan

In the event that an individual is tested positive for COVID-19 after having attended a program or event on the church campus within 21 days of a positive test, the pastor and staff will take immediate action to close the church campus for a minimum of 7 days and no longer than 14 days. The identity of the individual will be protected by the church leadership in accordance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Franklin County Health Department will be notified immediately. The church will work in accordance with local and state health department to limit any possible spread within our community.

Anyone believed to have had contact with the individual in the last 21 days will be notified by e-mail from the church office. In order to mitigate further outbreak, all individuals who are believed to have had contact will be asked to self-isolate and be tested for COVID-19 if it is believed they are showing symptoms.

All areas of the church will be cleaned and sanitized prior to re-opening.

This re-entry plan was approved by the Royston First United Methodist Church Leadership Team on June 15, 2020. It is a working document that will change as we continue to learn more about COVID-19 and how we can safely gather with our congregation on the church campus. Any changes or updates to the re-entry plan shall be discussed with the Leadership Team for approval.