

Reopening Church – Our Vision

Our St. John's ministry team, our staff and our church leadership are excited about coming back to church after not being able to gather during these early months of the coronavirus. We recognize that our return is taking place not at the conclusion of the coronavirus, but while it is still a threat to our society. Offering this plan, we recognize that life and church life is not going to immediately return to what it was before COVID-19; therefore, how we live out our mission as the church will not be identical to what it was a few short months ago. This plan for restarting church is not a focus on religious freedom or personal rights, though we view them as tremendously important. This plan is focused on the commandments to love God and neighbor. John Wesley's first Simple Rule, "Do no harm" compels those of us who are Jesus' disciples shaped by the Wesleyan tradition to make sure that our actions do not harm others, even if we are not intentionally doing so. This means that we need to exhibit abundant caution and, for the foreseeable future, act to keep everyone as safe as possible and to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Church attendance is voluntary and we certainly understand that many of our church family will choose for the time being to continue to stay home to protect their health. We support the decisions you make and encourage all of our church family to make a decision that is best for them and that keeps them safe. Please know that we will continue to broadcast our worship services through our website, www.stjaiken.org, through Facebook (St. John's UMC) and our YouTube channel ([stjaiken.org](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCstjaiken)), and via FM radio, 92.7 (one-week delay).

Plan Development

Our plan has been developed with the utilization of many resources. Not only have we taken the ideas and thoughts of our church ministry team, staff, and lay leadership, but we have also utilized guidance from our governmental and health leaders and experts, Bishop Jonathon Holston and his cabinet, and a number of other churches.

Key Considerations

The safe reopening of St. John's will involve at least four elements in the coming weeks and months knowing that a AUGUST 2 opening is subject to change as conditions warrant:

1. We will in as much as our setting allows, follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, Governor Henry McMaster, Bishop Jonathon Holston and federal guidelines.

2. We will practice appropriate social distancing, appropriate sanitizing and cleansing guidelines, the wearing of masks (we will make masks available on a limited basis, but due to the shortage of PPE we strongly encourage everyone to provide their own) and the practice of utilizing limited and clearly marked entry and exit points at St. John's and the established seating and gathering requirements.
3. Cooperation from all individuals, particularly those who are symptomatic or in an at-risk or compromised population. Please know that church attendance is voluntary, and no one should come who is frightened. Make the right choice that is best for you. Do not come if you are sick or have been exposed to a known positive case of COVID-19 unless there has been a 14 day quarantine.
4. Constant evaluation of available guidance and appropriate health data that is available. We will monitor all guidelines and take appropriate action. We believe that your best interest is God's first interest. We will implement everything we can to make sure that St. John's is the safest place in Aiken.

Worship Service and Guidelines

St. John's will resume onsite worship services effective AUGUST 2, 2020. We will be offering five services each Sunday. They will be as follows:

Traditional Service A – This service will be held at 8:30 a.m. and is for those of St. John's that are at-risk, compromised and those of any age who have underlying medical conditions. Additionally, those with autoimmune diseases (Lupus, Celiac Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, receiving treatment for cancer, etc.) may wish to consider this service. This service should provide those of St. John's that are at risk, compromised or suffering with an autoimmune disease a safer environment for worship as a result of smaller numbers of people in attendance. The guidelines for safe practices for worship and gathering as shown further in this plan will be adhered to for this service and **ALL** services at St. John's United Methodist Church. Vocalists and musicians will be limited by number and will maintain a distance of 20 feet between them and the congregation, and maintain 10 feet between vocalists.

Traditional Service B – This service will be held at 11:00 a.m. and will be open to all that wish to enjoy a traditional form of worship. The guidelines for safe practices for worship and gathering as shown further in this plan will be adhered to for this service and **ALL** services at St. John's United Methodist Church. Vocalists and musicians will be limited by number and will maintain a distance of 20 feet between them and the congregation, and maintain 10 feet between vocalists.

Contemporary Service A – This worship service will be held at 9:02 a.m. in our St. John's UMC Faith Center and will be open to all that wish to enjoy a contemporary style of worship. The guidelines for safe practices for worship and gathering as shown further in this plan will be adhered to for this service and **ALL** services at St. John's United Methodist Church. Vocalists and musicians will be limited by number and will maintain a distance of 20 feet between them and the congregation, and maintain 10 feet between vocalists.

Contemporary Service B – This worship service will be held at 11:00 a.m. in our St. John's UMC Faith Center and will be open to all that wish to enjoy a contemporary style of worship. This service will follow its own contemporary Order of Worship but will feature the sermon and the scripture reading being streamed to the Faith Center from our Traditional Worship Service B in the St. John's UMC sanctuary. The guidelines for safe practices for worship and gathering as shown further in this plan will be adhered to for this service and **ALL** services at St. John's United Methodist Church. Vocalists and musicians will be limited by number and will maintain a distance of 20 feet between them and the congregation, and maintain 10 feet between vocalists.

Sunday Evening Vespers – This worship service will be held at 6:00 p.m. around the fountain in front of the sanctuary. It will be an informal and casual time of worship. Bring your lawn chair and enjoy this relaxed time of prayer, worship, and since we are outside, singing will be a part of the service. As with all of our services, **ALL** guidelines including social distancing and wearing masks will be adhered to. We are hopeful that we will be able to transmit this service via FM transmitter, which would provide for drive up/stay in your car ability to enjoy the service. Vocalists and musicians will be limited by number and will maintain a distance of 20 feet between them and those who are gathered, and maintain 10 feet between vocalists.

Criteria and Action Steps for Worship Services

Capacity for Worship Services:

Based on guidance that suggests spacing of six feet between, in front of and behind every person to achieve safe social distancing objectives coupled with suggestions that no church nor facility allow more than 50% of maximum capacity for a gathering, we have determined that no more than 419 people can populate our sanctuary at any given time for any single gathering and no more than 127 can populate our Faith Center for any single gathering. With four Sunday morning worship services this should provide us the opportunity for up to 1092 people to worship on Sunday mornings. Additionally our new Sunday Evening Vespers will enable us to have 200 or slightly more worshippers.

Usher Training:

A training session(s) will be held to train ushers on appropriate seating protocols, safe spaces, utilization of masks, maintaining closed worship space while appropriate cleaning between services occurs, seating and dismissal practices, appropriate form of collecting offering, and how to assist those that need help while maintaining the safety measures of this plan.

Arrival, entry, seating and exit for Worship Services:

All current parking for St. John's will be available for usage as it was prior to this point. It is important, however, to know that the front entrance of the sanctuary and the Faith Center will be the only access for our services. There will be no thru traffic or use of other church buildings to access either of these entry points. Those parked in the back parking lots will not be able to walk through the building.

Ushers will be trained to follow a seating plan that will provide for safe and social distancing to take place. Spouses and family units that live together under the same roof will be allowed to sit closer than the required social distancing of six feet. Seating will utilize every other pew for safe space practices. All others will be seated at six foot intervals. All that enter will maintain safe social distancing while waiting to be seated by an usher. We will label all entry and exit aisles and ask those attending to please utilize those specific aisles for entry and exit. All that attend will be seated by an usher and dismissed by an usher. All are to remain seated until the usher dismisses them. Entering the sanctuary will be down the center aisle. To avoid passing within six feet of congregants, we will have to seat people in the sanctuary and Faith Center from front to back. Exiting the sanctuary will be down side aisles to side doors, one family group or individual at a time. Exiting the Faith Center will be through the Chesterfield Street doors, one family group or individual at a time.

There will be no coffee stations nor coffee shop treats or gathering at this time. Guidance advises against the gathering of small groups within a larger setting. The utilization of only worship spaces at this time also restrict those gatherings. We will not be able to utilize our church busses for transport to and from services at this time.

We join our church family in the excitement of being able to worship with one another again, but we want to make certain that we greet one another in ways that joyfully acknowledge each other without physically touching or violating social distancing practices. All persons attending our services will be required to wear masks at all times with the exception of clergy and vocalists and only when they are speaking or singing. Handshakes, hugs, elbow bumps, fist bumps or physical touching outside of families living under the same roof will not be permitted.

Weekly offerings will be collected in baskets/containers placed at the exits and each individual will have the opportunity to share their offering as they leave whichever service.

We encourage those attending to utilize restrooms only in the event of an emergency as spreading of viruses and bacteria is heightened in high-touch areas with water vapor and water droplets.

We will clean surfaces and utilize newly purchased disinfectant atomizer machines between all worship services to maintain a clean, sanitized and safe space for all that attend our worship services. All appropriate and deeper cleaning will take place Monday through Friday. There will be no hymnals, pens, cards, etc. of any kind in our seating areas.

Order of Worship:

All of our worship services will be shorter in length and will average 45 minutes per service. As a result of the guidance being provided on the aerosol effect of spreading germs and bacteria we are following the guidance of our Bishop in not having **congregational** singing nor will we utilize a large group choir. The safe distancing of six feet practiced by the congregation would be mitigated by the aerosol that comes from large-group singing, therefore, the 9:02 Band will follow a 10 foot social distancing protocol from each other, and so will the vocalists in the Traditional Services. We, therefore, will provide instrumental music, soloists and small group ensembles, but only when they are at a 20 foot distance from the congregation, and 10 feet from each other. Congregants may feel free to hum along, but there will not be congregational singing of any kind at this point, except for Sunday Evening Vespers which includes singing with a mask. Doors to the two worship spaces will remain open to increase air flow.

Order of Worship for Traditional A & B Services:

Prelude

Call to Worship

Apostles Creed

Gloria Patri

Anthem

Pastoral Prayer, the Lord's Prayer

Hymn Meditation

Scripture

Sermon

Benediction

Doxology & Offering

Order for Contemporary A & B Services:

Praise Song

Announcements

Praise Song

Affirmation of Faith

Pastoral Prayer, the Lord's Prayer

Musical Meditation

Scripture

Sermon

Praise Song

Offering & Benediction

Sunday Evening Vespers:

Invocation

Two hymns/praise songs

Time of witness and prayer

Scripture and Meditation/Study

Praise Song

Benediction

**Guidelines for Small Groups, Bible Studies, Youth and Children's Activities
and Sunday School Classes**

Upon reopening we will not be holding Sunday School Classes, Choir, Bible Studies, church committee and ministry meetings, youth or children's activities and other non-worship gatherings in face to face meeting style on the premises as we have become accustomed. We encourage the use of Zoom, Web-ex and other online programs that allow for groups to meet electronically. Contact Amy Jernigan or Becca Hartsell to get help on electronic meetings.

Summary of Plan

Do No Harm

- If you are symptomatic, please stay home. (Fever, Cough, known exposure over previous 14 days to COVID-19)
- Stay up to date on current symptoms and illness concerns regarding COVID-19.
- Please be mindful that the 8:30 worship service is offered for those that are at-risk, those of any age who have underlying medical conditions and those with autoimmune diseases. Please see plan for an expanded explanation.

Social Distancing

- Six foot social distancing will be practiced for all worship services and any other church activity. Six feet from the front, back and both sides will be adhered to.
- We will not be able to have physical contact. No hugs, elbow bumps, fist bumps nor any form of physical touching.
- Family groups (each individual family living under the same roof) will be able to sit at a closer distance.
- Please plan the appropriate amount of time to arrive and to make your way to the designated entrances. Entrances and exits will be labeled and will be only one way traffic. No thru traffic via the church building will be available, so please plan appropriately. **Additionally, our ushers will seat and dismiss everyone**, therefore allowing time and appropriate social distancing as you wait will be important.
- We encourage use of restrooms only in the event of an emergency.

Personal Protection

- Masks will be required for all in attendance, with the exception of clergy, musicians and vocalists when speaking or singing. We encourage everyone to bring their own mask, however St. John's will provide a mask for those that do not have one. Masks should be worn at all times while on church premises.
- Hand sanitizer stations will be available at the entrances, both the sanctuary and the Faith Center.

- Weekly offerings will be collected in baskets/containers that will be placed at the exits and each individual will have the opportunity to share their offering as they leave the service.

Safe Spaces

- Our ushers will be trained on how to seat within the scope of this plan. The worship spaces (Sanctuary and Faith Center) will utilize seating on every other pew or row.
- Congregational singing will not be a part of our worship at this time and singing by congregants is discouraged. (Humming is permitted) The Sunday Evening Vesper Service will allow for singing.
- There will be no coffee stations, no coffee and treat gathering area and we discourage bringing food or drink inside of the church buildings.
- At the present time there will be no Sunday School classes meeting on the premises, no choir practices, no regular meetings, and no children's or youth activities held on the church premises. We encourage our Sunday School Classes and or ministry/committee groups to meet electronically via Zoom or Web-Ex. Please contact Amy Jernigan or Becca Hartsell to learn more about setting up electronic meeting.
- There will be no nursery, children's sermon, or children's chapel available for our worship services.
- There will be no utilization of the church busses for transport to our worship services at this time.
- All cleaning and sanitizing protocols of this plan will be adhered to. The worship space will be cleaned and sanitized between each respective service.