

What's Next?!

Updated May 22, 2020

If you read this document online, there are a few updates *[marked with brackets and bold/italics]* since it was written. All previous bold text has been changed to underlines. Here's the latest information at the current moment.

St. Mark's Council met Wednesday, May 6, 2020 via Zoom. We discussed how and when to begin reopening the church building for regular functions. Before I jump into the details of the decisions we made, I feel compelled to remind you of the things I wrote in my newsletter article about the 2 things we will need most from you when we start this reopening process:

1. Worship Servants
 - Greeters (this job will be different than before)
 - Ushers (this job will be different than before)
 - Readers/Liturgists
 - Special Music
 - Video team members
 - Cleaners after each service
2. Patience

Timeline

St. Mark's current plans are to reopen the building for our normal schedule (including worship) effective June 1, 2020. That would mean our first in-building worship would be **Sunday, June 7**. I say that's what we "currently plan" because we will continue to monitor the situation as things in our community open back up. If we see a spike in COVID-19 cases, we may delay that date further. I don't foresee any circumstance that would move that date forward.

[We are still on track for that timeline. We have not considered outside groups (like FIT) yet. We will see how the opening goes for St. Mark's, and hope to reopen to other groups in July.]

How Will It Look?

[VERY IMPORTANT ADDITION: We anticipate being at Stage 3 of the governor's reopening plan on June 14! Please be aware of the recommendations for any of the risk categories that apply to you. While we don't want to treat you like a child and make a decision for you, we also don't want any harm to come to you. If you are at a higher risk, or if you don't feel comfortable coming to a gathering ... DON'T COME! We will love you from a distance until you're comfortable and safe being loved from nearby. We want to see you, but we will happily wait to see you for your safety.]

Let me begin with a few things to ask of you if you plan to come. These all fall in the category of "love your neighbor as yourself" so please follow them. I'm not asking for you to agree with any position or idea. I'm asking you to act in a manner that demonstrates the highest love to your fellow worshipers. Thank you!

- Please refrain from any physical contact with each other.

- I want to strongly encourage you to bring and wear a mask. According to what the experts are telling us, we should wear masks to keep each other safe. Your mask is not for your safety. It's for the safety of other people. So, wearing a mask may be uncomfortable ... but it's a very appropriate way to "love your neighbor" according to what we know about COVID-19. We will be trying to order a limited number of masks for anyone who does not have one with them. *If you come without a mask, you may be asked to wear one.*
[UPDATE: Based on the latest information from the CDC, since we will be singing, you will be required to wear a mask. If you come without a mask, you WILL be asked to wear one. If you don't, we cannot let you in.]
- Please consider giving electronically. Taking up a traditional "pass-the-plate" offering will not happen for some time. (More on that in a minute.) There is zero chance of transmitting disease through electronic giving, so if you have internet access, please consider switching to electronic giving to protect our ushers, counters, and the bank employees who will process our offering. You can use a credit/debit card to give electronically, but it is not necessary. You can have your offering taken directly from your checking account.
[We understand not everyone will do this. Our continued request is that you consider giving electronically. Once it's setup, you may never go back. But, we know some don't have internet access at all, and the learning curve would be too stiff for some less-internet savvy. I don't want anyone to feel guilty for giving in a traditional manner. I just want to encourage those who have the capability to choose otherwise until this is cleared up. Thank you for understanding, and thank you to all who have continued to financially support St. Mark's. You've made me proud through this circumstance.]

We will offer two services (8:15 & 10:30) as we did before.

Streaming

Our social isolation has taught us a lot. One lesson we've learned is that streaming our worship services has profound value. Whether the viewer is isolated for medical reasons, geographic reasons, or other reasons, we have experienced the benefit of having worship delivered online when we can't attend in-person. **WE DO NOT WANT TO END THIS SERVICE! [MAN, I really wanted to leave that last sentence bolded. 😊]** In the initial stages of reopening, I'm sure some people will still not be comfortable coming to a gathering with a lot of people. So, we want to continue streaming. Therefore, **WE NEED YOU!** We would like to develop a team of people to record, process, and upload our service each week. I will train the team and get them started. I will hand off leadership once the team is trained and in-place. If you are interested in serving on our video team, please email me SOON! (pastor@stmarksumchurch.org) We will need to gather that team before June 7, so time is of the essence in order to continue this service. (For reasons that are too long to explain here, Second Service will be the easier service to record.)

[We've spoken with our internet provider (and a couple of rival providers) about getting faster service in order to live stream. Those solutions are all a few months away. So, in the mean time, this team will record second service and upload to facebook. No Premiere time or live stream...it will just be an uploaded video.]

If you're slightly interested in being a part of that team, let me help you decide: All of the equipment will be provided, and it will be like shooting a video on your phone. We'll be using an iPad mini on a tripod, so moving around and even zooming in/out will be as easy as shooting your grandkids opening birthday gifts. The upload will have step-by-step instructions including screenshots, and someone will be available to help you through your first time or two of uploading if you need it.]

Greeters – By June, we should be able to prop doors open, so we will prop Doors 1 & 2 open. Door 1 will have limited greeters stationed 6' from the entrance (perhaps inside, perhaps outside) to verbally/visually greet people as they arrive. ONLY DOORS 1 & 2 WILL BE UNLOCKED!

[Greeters will have their option of standing inside or outside. With doors propped open, you should be able to walk into the sanctuary without touching a single doorknob or pull.]

Sanctuary changes

- We will block off seating in such a manner as to maintain 6' of social distance between each household. We'll sit every-other row, and the center 6' of each pew will be blocked off. ***[There is a crude (poor quality) video on Facebook of the chair setup in the front and the musical instrument placements, if you're interested in that sort of thing.]***
- Please bring your own Bible. The pew Bibles and hymnals will be removed because we don't have an adequate means of sanitizing them each week. Please bring your own Bible, and if you don't own one ... let me know and we'll make sure you can get one of your own!
- Some of our instruments may be rearranged to permit sufficient distance for our musicians ***[They have been.]***
- We have ordered 3 no-touch hand sanitizer stands. They will dispense hand sanitizer just by waving your hand underneath. (Hopefully they will arrive by June 1, but these supplies are very difficult to get at this point, so I can't promise these will be in place.)
[It looks unlikely that they'll arrive before June 7, but we'll also have small hand sanitizer bottles at the Worship Station.]
- You will quickly notice the "worship station" near the center sanctuary doors. We will discourage use of the Usher Room entrance, so those doors will be closed. See below for more specifics, but the "worship station" will include:
 - Bulletins ***[We've been advised to hand out nothing paper, so bulletins will be electronic only for the time being. Same link as you're using right now for it, but it will be a "regular" bulletin with more than just the order of service. <https://stmarksumchurch.org/worshipinfo>***
 - Recycle bin for bulletins ***[Not necessary since we won't have printed bulletins]***
 - Communion elements/trash can (Communion Sundays)
 - Offering Plates/Box ***[The Worship Station has an offering box attached.]***

Worship changes

- ~~We will not hand out bulletins. They will be available, but no one will be holding them and handing them out. ***[No printed bulletins]***~~
- ~~There will also be a recycle bin for your bulletin if you don't wish to take it home with you. PLEASE DO NOT PLACE YOUR BULLETIN BACK ON THE STACK OF BULLETINS FOR THE NEXT SERVICE TO USE! ***[No printed bulletins]***~~
- We will celebrate Communion on June 7. Pre-packaged Communion elements will be available at the "worship station." Pastor Ernie and I will bless the elements from the front, and everyone will take Communion in their seats.
- There will be a trash can at the "worship station" where you can throw away your cup as you leave the sanctuary.
- I will preach from the pulpit (or at least behind the communion rail). This will keep sufficient distance between me and the front row to meet social distancing requirements.
- We will have an offering time, but we will not take an offering during worship. We will encourage electronic giving during this time and explain how to give with paper or coins. There

will be offering plates (or perhaps a box) **[box]** at the “worship station” where you can place any paper/coin offerings.

- At the end of service, Ushers will dismiss you by rows to avoid a crowd gathering in a rush to leave. (Just imagine you’re at a wedding. 😊)
- I will “de-greet” from at least 6’ away and will not make any physical contact (hugs/handshakes) with anyone. I may even de-greet outside if the weather is nice.
- Until further notice, the Hospitality area will be closed. No coffee. No goodies. **[No congregating]**

Sunday School

Wings of Faith has been meeting by Zoom. They will finish the book they’re studying at the end of June, and the class will take a break for the rest of the Summer. **[Their intention is to meet outside in June, weather permitting.]** I’m asking the other two adult Sunday School classes to not meet in June and to consider taking a break the rest of the Summer. Youth & Children Sunday School and Nursery will not be offered when we first reopen. When they restart meeting will be determined by the ChildMin Team and the Youth Sunday School teacher.

“Other Stuff”

If the timeline doesn’t change, effective June 1, committee meetings will return to the building, with appropriate social distancing measures in place. If a committee is too large to effectively meet with social distancing, electronic means can still be utilized.

Youth might begin meeting sooner than June 1 **[they won’t]** at the Thieme Pond (outdoors) in consultation with the pastor.

[Terry and Sandy have been doing ‘porch visits’ where they drop off a bag/box of goodies for the youth. The best part of this has been meeting and talking with some of the parents we’ve never gotten a chance to really know. They’ll continue similar measures until they can gather without distancing or masks – we know how difficult those would be at the pond.]

Thank You

I want to thank the members of Council who have been diligent in staying informed during this shut-down. Their discussion and decision-making has been measured and reasonable. These are difficult decisions, and they’ve taken them seriously. We all want to open sooner than later, but we also want to open safely.

I also want to thank SPRC and Finance Committees. They have been quite involved in decisions involving staff and finances of the Church during the shut down. St. Mark’s is in good financial shape as we look at reopening, and I know not every church can say that. Strong financial standing and treating our staff rightly have made me proud of these teams!

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank you. The Finance Committee’s decisions were made much easier because your giving continued. Many of you have learned new skills to stay connected through Facebook and Zoom. Many of you have learned and setup electronic giving to keep our counters and our bank’s staff safer. You have made sacrifices to stay connected and make sure St. Mark’s remains on solid footing. Thank you. I am usually proud to be your pastor, but that’s even more true today because of your response to this extraordinary experience.

Let's take what we've learned, and use it to make disciples together! We envision a Christ-centered community of prayer and fellowship, reaching out with the hope and love of God.

[I want to reiterate that I miss you all so very much. But I don't want to jeopardize your well-being in any way. If your condition warrants that you stay away longer, please don't feel guilty at all about making the decision that's best for your health. As I said before, we will love you from a distance until you're comfortable and safe being loved from nearby.]

[If you have not served in any of the capacities listed above (reader, greeter, etc.), and are willing to start now since we will have limited people available, please let Arlette know (mail@stmarksumchurch.org). If you'd be willing to serve on the video team, please let me know (pastor@stmarksumchurch.org). Thank you.]

Pastor Chris