

Steps to Resuming In-Person Activities

We are a people created for relationship. The church that Jesus established is a communal one that involves being together in a meaningful way. While many of us have been able to remain in community throughout the COVID pandemic, our ability to gather has been limited. There are so many spiritual and psychological benefits to being able to see each other, talk face to face, and share space with one another. For this reason, we are excited about the prospect of being able to more fully gather again. However, we know that we must continue to approach in-person activities in a safe and reasonable manner. We are offering the below plan as a way to physically gather once again in a safe manner. This is based on research, scientific recommendations, and conversations with other churches and institutions. This past year has involved a lot of sacrifices and pain, but as we look to being able to gather again hopefully this plan can provide hope and joy that there is a metaphorical Spring at the end of this long winter.

	Current Status	Partial Vaccination	Partial Vaccination – Pentecost	High Vaccination	Statewide Guideline Easing
Conditions	<i>Unknown vaccination rate AND orange county or below</i>	<i>50%¹ vaccinated AND orange county or below</i>	<i>50% vaccinated AND orange county or below – May 23rd</i>	<i>80%² vaccinated AND yellow county or below</i>	<i>High statewide vaccination³ rates, state mandates removed, and yellow county or below</i>
Worship	We are gathering for worship in the sanctuary Masks are required, pews are marked off for physical distancing, there is no congregational singing, communion happens individually with brought supplies or prepackaged packs, offering plates are not passed, registration is required, and there is a maximum attendance capacity of 100. ⁴	Children’s Church will resume with Godly Play offered during worship. Any child 5 th grade and under who so desires will meet in the Godly Play room before service and remain until the end. There will be a Godly Play lesson and activities.		Congregational singing will resume. Offering plates can be passed and communion can be observed with communal elements. Registration will no longer be required to attend worship. We will still follow state mask and distancing mandates.	Masks will become optional and physical distancing measures such as ribbons on pews will be removed.

¹ This percent represents the low end of communal protection estimates. This percentage is of anyone over the age of 16.

² Represents the average estimate for communal protection and can be adjusted if more precise figures are determined. Percent of anyone over the age of 16.

³ Will depend on state guidelines.

⁴ Outdoor events allow for larger crowds, singing, and other activities.

	Current Status	Partial Vaccination	Partial Vaccination – Pentecost	High Vaccination	Statewide Guideline Easing
Conditions	<i>Unknown vaccination rate and orange county or below</i>	<i>50% vaccinated and orange county or below</i>	<i>50% vaccinated and orange county or below – May 23rd</i>	<i>80% vaccinated and yellow county or below</i>	<i>High statewide vaccination rates, state mandates removed, and yellow county or below</i>
Classes	One class is being offered as a hybrid both in-person and on Zoom and one fully-vaccinated Sunday School class is meeting. Masks and distancing are required. Youth and Children are doing sporadic in-person activities.	Any group can resume meeting inside as long as 6ft physical distancing ⁵ is possible between participants.	Children and Youth Sunday School classes will begin Sunday, May 23. This is in line with our normal transitions and allows time to recruit teachers, plan, and set up. ⁶	Masks and physical distancing are optional if your entire class has been vaccinated.	
Meals	There are no communal meals.			Communal meals will be allowed.	
Office	The office is closed to foot traffic, but staff are still available via phone or email.		The office will resume open office hours from 10 AM – 2 PM Monday – Friday. ⁷		
Rentals	We are not renting the facility for any groups.	Allowed for groups that can maintain 6 feet physical distancing. Meals not allowed.			All rentals will resume including close contact sports and those involving meals.

⁵ 3 ft for children

⁶ Children and Youth programs can offer in-person evening programming in some capacity before this date.

⁷ This potential delay is to allow staff time to make arrangements for childcare.

Explanations

Metrics for Resuming Activities

Since the pandemic started, we have been looking forward to the hope of vaccinations. Now that vaccinations are occurring, we can begin to consider when we might resume aspects of our communal life we've abstained from over the past year and a half. The metrics we will be using to determine safety of activities are vaccination levels and community transmission levels.

Vaccinations have been proven safe and effective⁸ at severely limiting a person's risk of contracting COVID.⁹ Also, vaccines severely limit the amount of virus that a vaccinated person spreads to others.¹⁰ As more of our congregation becomes vaccinated, fewer people will be at risk of contracting COVID, and at a much lower risk of serious illness if they are infected. After a certain amount of people have immunity everyone in the community has a high level of protection even if they haven't been vaccinated yet.¹¹ There is less disease present to be spread and the vaccinated people act as buffers to the unvaccinated, creating natural distance and dilution. Therefore, each of our steps involves a higher level of vaccinated people. To determine this, we will conduct anonymous surveys of the congregation to determine what percent of people over the age of 16 are vaccinated. Surveys must represent a minimum of 75 individuals to be considered valid.

To further ensure safety we will also consider the level of community spread in Scott County. This will allow us to protect against potential increased spread due to variants or other factors. The state labels counties by color based on the number of new cases (as a seven-day average) per hundred thousand residents. To be considered "orange" a county must have fewer than 25 cases per day per hundred thousand residents. To be considered "yellow" a county must have fewer than 10.¹² If Scott County is a yellow county it suggests that communal spread is low and there is less risk, regardless of vaccination levels. We will use WEDCO's numbers¹³ where available and the state's COVID dashboard¹⁴ if WEDCO data is not available.

Finally, no matter what stage we are in we will continue to comply with the mandates and requirements pertaining to masks, room capacity, and physical distancing established by state and local government.

⁸ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMoa2101765>

⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines.html>

¹⁰ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7013e3.htm?s_cid=mm7013e3_e&ACSTrackingID=USCDC_921-DM53321&ACSTrackingLabel=MMWR%20Early%20Release%20-%20Vol.%2070%2C%20March%2029%2C%202021&deliveryName=USCDC_921-DM53321

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/keythingstoknow.html>

¹² <https://govstatus.egov.com/kycovid19>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/WedcoHealth>

¹⁴ <https://kygeonet.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/543ac64bc40445918cf8bc34dc40e334>

What We Don't Know

There is one significant thing we do not know yet: we do not have specific information on when significant protection is provided for unvaccinated people¹⁵ due to mass vaccinations. Most experts have offered a range of 70%-90%^{16,17} vaccinated to offer protection for everyone in the community including people that aren't able to get the vaccine.¹⁸ However, we aren't able to narrow that down yet, and this research involves full populations. Risk factors for a limited community gathering for a short time are generally lower. What we are presenting is in-line with current research and what we know now, but as we learn more in this area it might reveal more or less risk that will cause us to reassess our plan.

Children and Youth

Currently, vaccinations are not available for anyone under the age of 16. This means that although our church might be highly vaccinated our children and youth departments will likely remain unvaccinated for several months. This will likely necessitate children and youth wearing masks and practicing physical distancing after it becomes safe to relax regulations for adults. We will continue to follow the recommendations for schools even if other general recommendations change. Currently that guidance is 3 feet physical distancing and masks.¹⁹

In multigenerational settings, even though children will not be vaccinated they will still have increased protection after a majority of our congregation is vaccinated. First, when a significant number of adults are vaccinated the virus is so diminished it become relatively safe even for those that cannot be vaccinated, like children. Vaccines have been shown to prevent both infection and spread of the virus.²⁰ There are fewer people to spread the disease and the vaccinated act as a buffer that creates more space between unvaccinated people. Second, children are naturally more resistant to infection and serious illness from COVID.²¹ Less than 10% of COVID cases in the US have been children and children who are infected are more commonly asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.²²

¹⁵ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/herd-immunity-lockdowns-and-covid-19>

¹⁶ <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-much-of-the-population-will-need-to-be-vaccinated-until-the-pandemic-is-over/>

¹⁷ <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/heres-when-we-may-have-enough-covid-19-vaccine-for-herd-immunity>

¹⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/keythingstoknow.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0319-new-evidence-classroom-physical-distance.html>

²⁰ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/03/29/vaccine-effective-essential-workers-study/>

²¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/go-ahead-plan-family-vacation-your-unvaccinated-kids/618313/>

²² https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-and-research/transmission_k_12_schools.html

Ventilation

To further mitigate risks, ventilation will be improved when possible. This includes leaving windows open in occupied classrooms, leaving air handler fans running to cycle air, adding MERV 13 filters that filter COVID particles to our air handlers, and utilizing outdoor spaces.²³

Congregational Singing

It has been shown that singing increases the risk of spread of COVID due to an increase in the force of air and droplets released.²⁴ At this time it is still not recommended that churches resume congregational singing.^{25,26,27} However, as vaccinations increase in our church and region, singing will once again become a safe option in church. There is not an exact percent of vaccination determined for when safe singing can resume, but the Center for Congregational Song recommends 80% vaccination (nationally) to start singing.²⁸ As with children, when we reach a high percentage of vaccinated adults the risk of community spread goes down even for those that aren't vaccinated. Therefore, even if everyone in the congregation is not vaccinated, a high percentage of vaccinated adults will allow for safe congregational singing. Even after we reach that mark as a congregation, we will continue to follow the recommendations of health officials involving physical distancing and wearing a mask that should further decrease the risk of spread.

Other Links

CDC recommendations for large gatherings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

CDC recommendations for churches: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

Kentucky's recommendations for churches: https://govsite-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/r00brFxTl2TJkofBUZUh_Healthy%20at%20Work%20Reqs%20-%20Places%20of%20Worship%20-%20Final%20Version%202.0%20Final.pdf

Kentucky Council of Churches recommendations (no updates since Summer): <http://www.kycouncilofchurches.org/covid19-response>

CDC risks at different ages: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-age.html>

CDC recommendations for fully vaccinated people: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

²³ <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-to-make-indoor-air-safer/>

²⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02786826.2020.1812502>

²⁵ <https://congregationsong.org/covid-19-singing-an-update-based-on-current-research/>

²⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

²⁷ <http://www.kycouncilofchurches.org/covid19-response>

²⁸ <https://congregationsong.org/covid-updates-congregational-song/>