

United Methodist Church

of Westport and Weston

49 Weston Road ♦ Westport, Connecticut 06880
203-227-4707

office@westportumc.org ♦ westportumc.org

Rev. Heather A. M. Sinclair, Pastor

COVID-19 Protocols for Worship

Approved by Church Council – September 10, 2020

Revised October 2020

Updates in “red text” for May 2021 Re-Opening of Sanctuary

Dear Church Family,

In the Methodist tradition, we strive to balance our theological beliefs with practical ministry. By following “The General Rules” of founder John Wesley: “Do No Harm. Do Good. Stay in love with God in disciplined ways,” we live out our values of loving God, neighbor and self.

As The United Methodist Church of Westport and Weston (UMCWW) and the State of Connecticut begins to re-open, we recognize the need for careful and cautious guidelines to protect the congregation and community, especially those who are at high-risk for contracting COVID-19.

As members of this congregation, we agree to follow these protocols from the United Methodist Church New York Annual Conference COVID-19 Guidelines for the health, safety and well-being of the church and community.

Before you come –

- Livestream worship will continue, so that those who are unable or not yet ready to attend in-person may join in the worshipping community. A schedule of weekly worship opportunities will be emailed to the congregation and posted on WestportUMC.org and Facebook. Equipment for livestreaming is present and will to be upgraded in the months to come. **The filming will focus on worship leadership, not the congregation, but all will be made aware that they may be filmed and videos will be posted online.**
- Persons 65 years of age and older, people with serious health conditions, or caregivers of someone with serious health conditions are encouraged to continue to stay home. Please monitor your temperature and general health at home. Anyone with a fever or exhibiting symptoms including: **fever or chills; cough; shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; fatigue; muscle or body aches; headache; new loss of taste or smell; sore throat; congestion or runny nose; nausea or vomiting; or diarrhea** needs to refrain from attending worship. A contact-less thermometer will be available for use, if needed.
- **It is highly recommended and encouraged that all who participate in-person gatherings have**

been fully vaccinated (ie receiving the full dosage of vaccine and two weeks past the date of the latest immunization).

- The church insurance company is recommending that all attendees sign a one-time waiver. The form will be posted on WestportUMC.org. It can be signed, scanned and emailed to the church prior to arrival. They will be kept in a confidential file in the church office. Additional forms will be available to be signed upon arrival.

Upon arriving at the church –

- Entry will be at the main entrance only for control of spacing.
- Both in the parking lot and building, maintain a safe distance (six feet) from people who do not live together. Signage and floor markings will guide safe distancing. Posters will remind people of mask-wearing and symptoms listed above.
- Everyone must wear a face mask, fully covering the nose and mouth, at all times (indoors and outdoors). Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. We ask that persons bring and wear their own masks. Masks will be available for those who arrive without one. If a person arrives without a mask and/or refuses to wear one, they will be 1) asked to wear a mask; or 2) asked to leave the building and join online worship from home. The entire congregation will be dismissed if one or more persons do not comply with the mask rule.
- A greeter will be at the main entrance for a wellness and mask check. The greeter will take attendance and note contact information for visitors. These attendance list will be kept on file in the church office if there is a need for contact tracing.
- Please refrain from hugging or shaking hands. Waving or other non-touch signs should take the place of handshaking for the foreseeable future.
- Hand sanitizer stations will be in the narthex. Please use upon entry. Due to constraints on supply, we suggest that you bring a personal sized sanitizer, if possible.

In the Sanctuary -

- Seating will be by family units, alternating pews from front to back and left to right. Pews where seating may occur will have signs and cushions. All other cushions will be removed.
- Children must remain with their family at all times during the service (and for bathroom visits). Children's Moments will take place with children in their seats. Families are invited to bring their own activity bags with writing/coloring implements and books. Coloring pages and kids bulletins will be available to print at home. The re-opening of Nursery Care, Sunday School and Youth Programs will be phased in as permitted by states, local and NYAC guidelines.
- The sanctuary capacity will be calculated based on the current local, state and CDC guidelines.
- Bibles, Hymnals, prayer card, notebooks and pencils will be removed from the pews.

Announcements, prayers and readings will be projected on the screen. Bulletins will be emailed to members for advance printing at home. A limited number will be printed for pick-up. **A QR code has been created in order to download the bulletin on mobile devices.**

- The scripture reader, if live in the sanctuary, and preacher will remain seated and masked at the lectern and pulpit seats for the duration of the service in order to maintain proper social distancing. Masks may be removed while speaking at the microphone. Microphones will be cleaned after each service.
- Choral singing will be pre-recorded until further notice. Special Music will be either piano, organ, string or percussion instruments. Social distancing of 10 feet will be maintaining for any soloist. **There will be no congregational singing in the sanctuary. Small singing groups may sing live, with masks and distanced by at least 10 feet from each other and the congregation. Congregational singing in the sanctuary will be allowed with well-fitting masks worn over the mouth and nose.**
- Prayer requests should be sent to the Church Office by 12pm on Friday or to Pastor Heather by 8am on Sunday to be included in worship. An updated Prayer List will be emailed weekly. Prayer requests will not be spoken aloud during worship, nor will a microphone be shared.
- The Passing of the Peace of Christ will be shared without physical contact. Watch Pastor Heather to learn the sign language.
- ~~Baptisms will be suspended during the re-opening phase and until allowed by the Bishop.~~ **Baptisms may occur in accordance with guidelines released by the NYAC. The sacrament will be offered with limited physical touch, while maintaining social distancing of family members and sponsors. All baptisms must be scheduled with Pastor Heather at least one month in advance, except in cases of family emergencies.**
- Holy Communion will be served only with pre-packaged juice and wafer packets. They will be distributed to the congregation as they arrive. Trash cans will be placed at the rear of the sanctuary for wrappers.
- A secured collection box will be present at the rear of the sanctuary for offerings. Offerings can be mailed or given on-line via the website. The collection box will be lined with a plastic bag which will be removed and place in the office safe for at least 24 hours before masked and gloved counters process checks and cash.

Outdoor Worship

- Outdoor Worship will follow the same guidelines as above regarding no-contact gathering, singing, the Passing of the Peace, the sacraments, and the offering. There will be no printed bulletins.
- Upon arriving on the church grounds, follow the direction of parking attendants. Maintain social distancing (6ft) as you exit and enter your vehicles and move to and from the gathering area. A greeter will be present to take your name and contact information. Waivers will also be available for those who have not completed one on-line.

- Bring your own chair and or blanket. Family groups will be seated together, 6ft from the next family or individual.
- Face masks must be worn at all times (see details above).
- The preacher and/or leader will maintain a distance of 10ft from the gathering. A portable sound system will provide amplification.

Restrooms

- Restrooms will be open, however, we encourage members to limit their use.
- Each restroom is marked as single occupancy (single family). Please wait in the hallway if the restroom is in use. Young children should be accompanied to the restroom by a parent.
- The restrooms are supplied with cleaning caddies, including surface disinfectant and hand sanitizer, which should be used on high-touch surfaces following each use. Signage with directions is in the restroom.

Upon Leaving Worship –

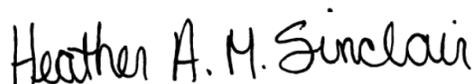
- Ushers will dismiss the congregation row by row from back to front, so that social distancing can be maintained.
- There will be no coffee, food, fellowship gathering or in-person Grace Connexion in the re-opening phase. Any conversation should take place outside with proper social distancing of 6ft or more. Opportunities for fellowship, study and discussion will be offered via Zoom.

These guidelines may be changed by UMCWW leadership as the health situation in the community changes. The congregation will be notified of changes as they are made.

We are in this journey with God and one another.

Peace,

Rev. Heather A. M. Sinclair, Pastor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather A. M. Sinclair". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.