

A Word from Woody. . .
“What to Expect at Re-Opening”

First, the bad news: Lake Vista UMC has not opened yet to in-person worship, a situation that have existed since March 22nd. And now the good news: we will soon!

Our Church Council met on Tuesday, May 26th and discussed the situation of re-opening. We have decided not to re-open until Phase 2. It is true that our state has entered Phase 2 on June 5th, but unfortunately New Orleans has not. Once New Orleans is in Phase 2 the Church Council will meet and put plans in place for our first in-person worship service since the worship services shut-down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. What will such a re-opening look like?

We will have to get used to a few differences which the Church Council, *at this time*, plans on making. There will no use of pew Bibles or hymnals. This will be a great chance for us to bring our own Bibles to church! There will be no singing, communion, baptisms, or touching during greetings. Everyone in attendance will be asked to wear a mask, except for the pastor—from whom the congregation will be sitting more than six feet. You should know that if you happen to forget your mask we will have fresh, unused masks available for the worship service. People will not sit on the pew cushions, and will be sitting at least six feet from one another; family households will be allowed to sit together. No church water fountains will be used. The church offertory will not be collected during the service, but the offering basket(s) will be placed in a stationary place, probably close to the front entrance to the sanctuary. There will be only two entrances to the sanctuary—the front and the handicap entrance. The worship service will end with individual pews being dismissed, one at a time, so as to allow for social distancing.

One area of concern is the age restriction guideline placed by the Office of State Fire Marshall. “Individuals 65 years or older, people of all ages with poor control of medical issues like high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, or a weakened immune system are at a higher risk for getting very sick or dying from COVID-19 and should strictly adhere to all CDC guidelines, including recommendations against attending religious services in person, and are encouraged to stay at home as much as possible.” I do not know how long this

age and health restriction guideline will be in place, but I would assume it would be at least through Phase 2. The church will of course not be turning people away who are 65 or older or a health risk. The above is a guideline and recommendation for the safety of those deemed to be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. As someone who had a mild case of the coronavirus last month (I got two nasal swab tests on May 25th and 27th which were negative—Praise God!) I can assure you I don't wish this virus on anyone! But everyone is allowed to come to church worship as he or she decides best. Please be prayerful about your decision.

We are also working on a plan to be sure the sanctuary is wiped down and sanitary, especially from the previous worship service. Bathrooms will also have to be regularly cleaned. There will be hand sanitizers at both entrances of the church for everyone to use whenever they feel the need to do so.

Small groups and children's ministries will not meet during Phase 2, even when the church re-opens for in-person worship. The use of Zoom will still be the primary way we will meet. A small group will be allowed to meet in-person outside with social distancing of six feet per person, but the hot summer weather may not make this an attractive option.

You should also know that the Church Council decided to cancel the MFUGE youth mission trip and Vacation Bible School for this summer. It breaks our hearts to have to do this, but there are too many uncertainties as we as a city proceed through the phased openings.

Those are the plans we have for when we open for in-person worship. Please keep the Church Council in your prayers as we decide when will be the first time to do so. That first Sunday will be a joyous occasion!

Yours in Christ's Love,

Woody