

First Baptist Church of Tellico Village

A STRATEGY FOR REOPENING

Who would have imagined 6 months ago that we would be facing a global pandemic and that we would have to close the doors of businesses, schools, universities, offices, restaurants, and even churches? It has been a difficult and challenging time. However, we are beginning to see a glimmer of hope.

Remember, even though we are bombarded with news programs that project gloom and doom, and feed the fear that naturally rises up within us, we serve a God who has told us throughout His Word to not be afraid.

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. – Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. – Joshua 1:9 NIV

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. – Psalm 56:3 NIV

We are also reminded of this promise:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28 NIV

Be assured that God is still doing a work in and through His Church, even in the midst of this pandemic and the circumstances that it brings.

That being said, the question we are asking ourselves is this, “When and how are we going to begin to reopen our church building and gather again for worship, Bible study and fellowship?” First of all, we as a staff, are constantly monitoring the recommendations being put forth by our government leaders, particularly the Governor of Tennessee and his office. Just as the leaders of our federal and state government in conjunction with health experts are recommending a phased approach to reopening stores, businesses, etc., we will be following their guidelines and will institute a phased reopening of our church building for worship, Bible study and other activities. The staff, along with the Leadership Council are proposing that we begin to gather again for worship on **Sunday, May 17**. Details regarding how Phase I will look are given below.

General Reminders

As we reopen our facilities, it is important that we remind everyone in our church family about the following:

- Please practice good personal hygiene
 - Frequent hand washing
 - Frequent hand sanitizing
 - Multiple hand sanitizing stations are available at the entrances and throughout the building.
 - Practice social distancing
- If you are sick or feeling under the weather, please stay home.
- If you are uncomfortable being here, please stay home and join us online.

Here is our plan to reopen our building:

Phase I

- The date we will begin gathering again for worship is **Sunday, May 17**.
- The length of time we will be in Phase I is to be determined.
- We anticipate beginning with worship only as we reopen. Bible study will begin again at a later date.
 - Two identical services. One at 9:00 a.m. and the other at 10:30 a.m.

- Both services will be approximately 45 minutes each, allowing time for the building to clear between the two services.
- Each service will accommodate 150 people.
- We will ask members to sit on every other pew (these will be marked) and maintain 6 feet between themselves and other worshippers. This does not apply to spouses and member of the same household.
- We will remove all hymnals and Bibles from the pews.
- At first, the services will not include a choir. We hope to add a mini-choir for each service within the first few weeks. Orchestra for the services is still TBD.
- We will NOT pass the offering plate during worship. Instead we will have a point of collection, either a box or basket, at each of the main entrances to the sanctuary for worshippers to make their offering as they leave. This will be our standard practice moving forward.
- We will NOT pass the communion trays when we share communion. We are looking at various options, but, at least initially, will likely use disposable communion sets similar to the ones we used during our drive-through communion. Worshippers will pick them up when they enter the sanctuary.
- We will have a team of volunteers who will sanitize specified areas between services at the direction of our Facilities Manager, Joey Shults.
 - Doors, door knobs, handles
 - Restrooms
 - Pews
- Ushers and greeters will be given specific instructions on how they are to serve, keeping socially distanced while welcoming and greeting members and guests.
 - Keeping a physical distance of 6 feet, greeters should stand off to the side to verbally greet people arriving for worship.
 - Greeters will need to be identified – bigger name tags, vest, shirt, etc.
 - Do not touch people, no handshakes, hugs, etc.
 - Ushers will likewise maintain a “physical distance” of 6 ft. while assisting people before and during worship.
 - We will provide a single handout that will include the order of service and sermon outline. Ushers will hand these out with gloved hands.
- All entrances to the building will be open.
- The Fellowship Hall and all classrooms will be closed.
- The Coffee Fellowship in the Narthex will be temporarily suspended. A new plan will be developed on how to serve coffee during this time as we move forward.

Phase II and Following:

Bible Study (Sunday School)

Kem and the Discipleship Team are working on a plan for starting Bible Study classes again. Sunday morning Bible Studies will not resume at the same time that worship begins.

Wednesday Night Meal and Prayer Meeting.

Charlie and the staff will be working with Sheryl and the kitchen crew to develop a plan to begin Wednesday night meals and Prayer Meeting. That date is yet to be determined.

Video Recording of Worship, Bible Study and Prayer Meeting

The video recording of worship, Bible study and Prayer Meeting has proven to be a valuable tool in keeping our church family connected and will continue.

While we long for things to return to some sense of “normal,” the health and safety of the members of our church family and our community is paramount. Therefore, we will carefully consider the recommendations of our government leaders and health officials as we move forward. Some things that were part of our old “normal” will not be part of our new “normal.” However, we are still the Church, the Body of Christ; and we will continue to be salt and light in our community and beyond. To God be the glory!