



Gary E. Mueller

RESIDENT BISHOP

The United Methodist Church  
Arkansas Area  
800 Daisy Bates Drive  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72202-3770

(501) 324-8019

ARKANSAS CONFERENCE

June 22, 2020

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

I am grateful to God for your faithfulness, creativity and concern for others during the current COVID-19 pandemic that continues in Arkansas. You have offered a powerful witness to God's love as you have adapted ministry to the new and uncharted landscape of the coronavirus. However, we still have a long road to travel in the months ahead. Cases are increasing, the number of people hospitalized is steadily climbing, more people are on ventilators than ever before and the number of deaths is higher than at any time during the outbreak.

The fact of the matter is that we are still in a crisis, and Governor Asa Hutchinson has extended the State of Emergency. As your Church Relaunch Team plans for a safe reopening, it is important to keep in mind the risks that church gatherings pose. Dr. Nate Smith, Secretary of Health for Arkansas, stated on Friday, June 19 that churches need to be especially diligent in protecting those who come because of the threats involved.

I continue to be very concerned about the safety of those gathering in our churches for worship, study, discipleship formation and fellowship. In fact, it is highly likely that at least one person in any gathering has an active case of coronavirus and is capable of infecting others even if he or she is asymptomatic. This is why I continue to move much more slowly than other church leaders in re-opening our churches. If I were a pastor of a church right now, I would be doing everything possible to convince my lay leadership to wait until at least later this summer before resuming in-person church activities involving more than 10 persons.

What follows is highlights of my latest guidance based on input from medical professionals, public officials, conversations and prayer. Complete and up-to-date guidance can be found at <https://arumc.org/covid19/>. I hope and pray that you will see its wisdom and abide by it so that we keep as many people as possible as safe as possible.

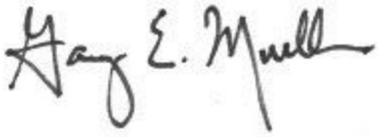
1. All churches must treat Governor Asa Hutchinson's guidance for religious-based organizations issued May 4, 2020 as a directive.

2. All relaunch plans must be shared with your District Superintendent prior to being publicized. All relaunch plans must be approved by a congregation's Board of Trustees before being implemented.
  
3. Revised ARUMC Stage 2 will begin June 28, 2020.
  - a. Masks must be worn indoors at all times. Post signs indicating that anyone who refuses to wear a mask will not be allowed to join in-person gatherings. Have a plan approved by the Board of Trustees for the actions that will be taken if an attendee refuses to wear a mask.
  - b. Safe social distance seating of up to 50 persons is allowed for any indoor or outdoor in-person gathering.
    - i. This maximum number of 50 is based on a request from the State of Arkansas in order to conduct tracing if someone with COVID-19 has been present at an in-person event.
    - ii. Safe social distance seating can be calculated by taking the square footage of available seating space in a room (not total square footage in a room) and dividing it by 36 (which is the 'safety bubble' of six-by-six feet). If your sanctuary can accommodate safe social distance seating for 30 people, this is the maximum number of people who can gather in-person. If your sanctuary can accommodate safe social distance seating for 200 people, 50 is the maximum number of people who can gather in-person. **No church, regardless of safe social distancing size, may have more than 50 people at an indoor or outdoor event during revised ARUMC Stage 2.**
  - c. Youth ages 12-18 can meet using the revised ARUMC Stage 2 [Guidelines](#).
  - d. No children's activities or childcare shall be offered. Children may join their parents for other church gatherings.
  - e. All church meetings must meet all ARUMC Stage 2 Guidelines
  - f. Worship
    - i. Worship, Bible studies and formation groups should continue to be livestreamed.
    - ii. Worship services should be no longer than 30-35 minutes since contracting COVID-19 involves both distance from infected persons and duration of exposure.
    - iii. All worship leaders and musicians may take off their masks while leading worship. All worship leaders must remain 12 feet apart.
    - iv. There will be no congregational singing.
    - v. Individually wrapped elements should be used for the Sacrament of Holy Communion
  - g. All weddings and funerals must meet all ARUMC Stage 2 Guidelines.

Please contact your District Superintendent if you have any questions.

I continue to pray for you, your staff, your congregation and those in your mission field as you make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples, equipped and sent to transform lives, communities and the world.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary E. Mueller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'G' and 'M'.

Gary E. Mueller  
Bishop