

Ebenezer UMC Reintegration and Support Plan

Ebenezer Church longs to reach people for Jesus Christ precisely where they are. Based on Christ's call to love one another we will strive to connect safely and in accordance with both state and Methodist guidelines. The following plan is a framework for reintegration and includes provisions of increased support for those remaining physically separated.

Because Bishop Lewis plans to limit in-person gatherings to 25 people for the time being, the size of our congregation prevents us from using the church property for ministry at this time. As those restrictions are relaxed, we will seek to integrate new guidelines as quickly and safely as possible.

To be successful we must meet **two objectives**:

- 1) *Provide increased support to those who remain physically separated.*
- 2) *Safely provide opportunities for in-person worship, discipleship, and service in line with state and denominational guidelines.*

Objective 1: Provide increased support to those who remain physically separated.

As some begin to move out of quarantine, those who remain in physically separated are likely to feel increasingly secluded. Ebenezer will adopt the following measures to ensure deeper connection among those who identify themselves as remaining distanced.

- A) Weekly Phone Calls: Each week, families/individuals remaining physically separated will receive a phone call from an Ebenezer staff member/volunteer.
- B) Weekly Zoom Room with the Pastors: Each week, one or both pastors will host group zoom conversations specifically for those remaining physically separated.
- C) Bi-Weekly Porch Visits: Every second week, a staff member/volunteer will visit people who need to remain physically separated and who wish to receive visits. The expectation is that the visitors will sit outside the residence on a lawn chair at a safe distance with no physical contact.
- D) Additional Resources: In addition to these heightened measures, Ebenezer continues to offer virtual small groups along with individual counseling and open group discussions over Zoom. Further, we may find those who remain physically separated will wish to participate in carrying out the measures outlined above.

Objective 2: Safely provide opportunities for in-person worship, discipleship, and service during step-down protocol.

State and Ecclesial Guidelines:

- A) Governor Northam is allowing in-person worship of not more than 50% capacity in a given space.
- B) Bishop Lewis issued a 77-page set of guidelines to govern movement toward in-person activities. The guidelines call for a cautious approach over three phases.

1. Phase 1 allows certain “Pioneer” churches to gather for in-person worship with:
 - a. No more than 25 people.
 - b. A start date of May 24, 2020.
 - c. No singing in worship due to increased risk of infection.
 - d. Bishop Lewis is also authorizing the launch of drive-in worship for all churches.
2. Phase 2 allows all churches to begin meeting again for in-person worship and gatherings with:
 - a. No more than 50 people.
 - b. An as-yet-unspecified start date.
 - c. No singing in worship due to increased risk of infection.
3. Phase 3 relaxes guidelines for in-person worship and gatherings with:
 - a. In-person worship with up to 50% of occupancy capacity.
 - b. An as-yet-unspecified start date.
 - c. A potential for congregational singing in worship if health guidance allows.

Ebenezer’s Framework

A) Ebenezer initially volunteered to be a “Pioneer” church. However, in light of Ebenezer’s size and the necessary deep cleaning between worship services, holding in-person worship for 25 or 50 people is impractical. Further, given the vital role of music in our worship services and our technical capacity to generate a high-quality worship broadcast, we feel it is most prudent to continue worshipping online through phase 2. In the interim period Ebenezer will:

1. Phase 1
 - a. Continue offering online worship, small groups, ministry teams, and support groups
 - b. Launch drive-in communion services beginning in late June
2. Phase 2
 - a. Launch increased care plan to support families who let us know they are remaining physically distant
 - b. Authorize and resource in-home and on-campus small groups for those who wish to begin meeting in-person again. Denominational restrictions prevent child care during phase 2.
3. Phase 3
 - a. Return to in-person activities as restrictions on numbers, singing, and child care are relaxed.

Drive-In Worship: As soon as practical Ebenezer will begin to offer drive-in communion services. These services are not intended to replace our online worship but will allow us to share in the sacrament together. According to the Bishop's guidelines:

- A. Those who wish to attend will be asked to inform the Church four days in advance.
- B. Upon entering the church property (parking lot), a team member, wearing a mask and standing at least six feet away, will offer masks to any who do not have one, instruct guests to remain in their cars and direct each vehicle to a parking space.
- C. There will be one space between each vehicle.
- D. The Bishop has issued clear instructions that guests must remain in their vehicles at all times and the building, including bathroom facilities, will not be open to guests.
- E. Guests may not participate on motorcycles, golf carts, or from the bed of a truck. They must remain in the enclosure of their vehicle.
- F. Except in the case of an emergency, any guest who exits their vehicle will be asked to return to their vehicle. If they do not comply, the pastor is under strict directions to end the service immediately.
- G. After the institution of the communion elements, prepackaged elements will be delivered to each vehicle by individuals wearing masks and gloves.
- H. Following the service, guests will be directed to exit by an Ebenezer team member.

Safety Measures for In-Home Small-Groups: Safety is of paramount importance as we begin the reintegration process. The following measures are a baseline to ensure continued diminishment of COVID-19.

- A. Upon request, Ebenezer will provide each Small Group with supplies to assist them creating and maintaining safe environments. Kits may include masks, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and shoe coverings.
- B. Anyone who is sick or running a fever should remain home.
- C. Masks should be worn.
- D. Social distancing should be observed.
- E. Food should not be shared between families.
- F. Ebenezer will be prepared to return to an online only environment if required by Governor Northam or Bishop Lewis.

Safety Coordinator: Each small group will need to designate a safety coordinator primarily concerned with helping create safe environments. The safety coordinator would remind people of the importance of social distancing, wearing masks, and sanitizing hands and spaces. They would inform the church when more supplies are needed.

Frequently Asked Questions:

I am remaining physically separated for the foreseeable future. How can I connect with Ebenezer? We will continue to offer online worship and small groups for any and all who wish to participate. In addition, if you will let us know you are remaining in physically separated, Ebenezer has developed a team of friends to help you stay connected through weekly phone calls and Zoom group check-ins with a pastor. Also, we are offering "front porch" visits. If you would

like, one of our team members will come to your front door for a visit. They'll bring their lawn chair, sit a safe distance away, and spend a few minutes fellowshiping with you.

Why aren't we meeting for worship at Ebenezer? Ebenezer is one of 1,100+ United Methodist Churches in Virginia led by Bishop Sharma Lewis. While Governor Northam has begun allowing churches to meet in larger groups, Bishop Lewis, out of an abundance of caution, is limiting the number of people who can gather at United Methodist Churches at 25. Because we routinely see over 1,400 people on our campus each weekend, it is not viable to meet at the church building.

When will we return to worship in person at Ebenezer? Ebenezer is working diligently to develop procedures that will allow safe and responsible on-site worship once Governor Northam and Bishop Lewis lift restrictions on the number of people allowed in a given space. At this time, we do not know when these restrictions will be lifted.

How can we worship in the meantime? In addition to our ongoing virtual worship each weekend, Ebenezer will begin to offer drive-in communion services in mid-June.

If I am not in a small group, how can I get in one? Email Chrissy, cleathers@ebenezerumc.org, and she will be happy to connect you with a small group.

Will Student Ministries begin to meet in person? Our student ministry leadership team is developing a plan for in-person small groups. Meanwhile, they will continue to meet online for the foreseeable future. Please go to ebenezerumc.org/students-online or contact Michelle Paquette at mpaquette@ebenezerumc.org for more information.

Will Children's Ministry begin to meet in person? By their very nature, kids love to touch and hug. Because of the profound difficulty of maintaining social distancing among children, we are encouraging families to worship together for the time being. We will continue to offer online resources for families including Sunday School. Also, please make sure to join us for Virtual Vacation Bible School starting June 15. For more information go to ebenezerumc.org/kids-students/ or email Shari Parsons at Sp Parsons@ebenezerumc.org.

When we return to the church building for worship, what should we expect? First, you should expect Ebenezer to do everything possible to keep you and your family safe. Our facility has undergone a deep clean, and we have not allowed groups to meet at the facility in the last several months. When we are allowed to meet in a larger group setting, we will work to follow the best guidance available. This may include wearing masks (which will be available for any who forget to bring them), providing hand sanitizer, marking appropriate social distances on our pews, and cleaning the sanctuary between services. We are also working to implement a "touchless" worship experience. We envision a worship experience in which you will not need to touch anything, even doors, from the time you leave your car until you return to it.

If I wish to schedule an event at Ebenezer, may I do so? When the Bishop informs us we are in phase 2, we will slowly begin to schedule activities as allowed by state and ecclesial guidelines. Please contact our Executive Director, B.J. Priest, bpriest@ebenezerumc.org, to inquire.

How will events be scheduled in such a way as to ensure appropriate cleaning between activities? In the near term, Ebenezer will schedule only one event, each day, in each room. This will allow our professional cleaning service to sanitize each space before another group uses it.

When will our confirmands be confirmed? We hope to be back to in-person worship soon. Because confirmation requires baptisms, involves students, mentors, families, and the whole of the congregation, we will plan to hold confirmation once in-person worship resumes.

When will we resume baptisms? Out of an abundance of caution, Bishop Lewis has requested churches not accomplish baptisms at this time. We are hopeful to resume baptisms once we return to in-person worship.

If I attend an event at Ebenezer and it is discovered that someone else who attended was infected with Coronavirus, will I be notified? Ebenezer will follow reporting guidelines as outlined by the CDC and will do all we legally can to inform any individuals who may have been exposed.