

Continuing Through COVID-19

A Handbook for Reopening Mt Pleasant UMC

12 June 2020

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Executive Summary

This plan for return to services at Mt Pleasant UMC, after closure due to COVID 19, was prepared by a team of members designated by Pastor Larry Davies. It consisted of Doug Smith, Earl Mielke, Brad Kirley, Claude Owen, Frank Osburn, Gary Cochard, Donna Kirley, J.D. Edwards, Scott Webster, and Charlotte Cochard. While we all long for return to normal, safety will probably preclude normal in-person worship for some time. Return to “normal” may not be before the Advent season.

This plan details the conditions that must be met and describes steps of a phased transition that must be adhered to. We do not expect our members to rush to attend the first in-person worship service. It will be socially distanced in designated seating beginning in the fellowship hall rather than the sanctuary. Attendees will be wearing masks for the duration of time in the church. There will be no choir or group singing.

We will be gradually moving in the direction of “normal” in a deliberate fashion over time as members become more comfortable that the safety of both attendees and worship leaders is being adequately protected. For those who do not yet feel comfortable worshipping in-person, we will continue our phone-in services from the sanctuary and enhance them to include video for those with capability to live stream video at home. Worship will be very different until conditions allow relaxation of restrictions. Some may join us by phone, some will watch from home on a computer, some will be in the fellowship hall watching on TV, and some will be in the sanctuary, but we will all be worshipping together. We pray that all will be patient, that our worship experiences are meaningful despite restrictions, and by following this plan, all will remain safe.

If you have questions or concerns about his plan, please contact Rev. Davies at praywithyou.org or Doug Smith at dougmaren2@gmail.com.

Sec 1. Goals for Returning to In-Person Worship at MPUMC

As we begin this plan for return to worship services in our church facility, it is right to remind ourselves of what we are about as a church and to set specific goals for the transition back to “normal”.

1. All planning and decisions regarding returning to in-person worship at Mt. Pleasant will begin with and be derived from the true purpose of worship – a sacred act and attitude of giving glory to our God.
2. In the midst of all the unrest, uncertainty, and even fear caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we will look forward with hope and trust in the loving power and grace of our Lord and Savior and focus on what God wants. Even if the details are a bit cloudy and we begin to feel that this is too hard to do, we will stay God-centered and focused on the sacredness of worship.
3. First and foremost, we will respect the safety and health of all. The whole world is learning about the virus, its health risks and what safe practices are required. The information and guidelines are changing every day and we can expect that to continue for the foreseeable future; therefore, we will stay informed and be willing and able to change plans in the interest of health and safety.
4. We will strive to return to as many of the familiar routines and practices as possible, consistent with safe practices, in order to embrace and encourage all MPUMC worshippers.
5. We will re-double our efforts to connect with our neighbors and community and welcome visitors with the same loving kindness and caring that built the dynamic congregation we have.
6. We will provide worship at MPUMC that will draw others to Christ.

Sec 2. Stages of Reopening

Six transition stages and two follow-on stages allow for a gradual smooth transition from current phone-in services to back to “normal”:

1. **Conference call worship audio only**

People will attend these worship services at home in a family setting. A dial-in number is provided allowing for unlimited people to join in the worship service. A designated person will “control” the service, muting attendees at appropriate times, cuing speakers and music per pre-distributed bulletin. This service, as well as all services described in the stages of reopening, will occur at a specified time each week.

2. Conference call worship from Mt Pleasant Church

In this stage, the above described conference call will occur from Mt Pleasant Church. The Pastor and specific designated people will be at the Church to conduct this audio service. Except for the location of the minister and sound technicians, all service attendees will worship at home as they have during the audio only service. This stage will only last for 2 services and provides an opportunity for testing of equipment and broadcast over the internet/ phone service. Bulletins will continue to be distributed through an email notice that also contains call-in information.

3. Conference call worship with video streaming and organist

We are excited about the video streaming and organist stage of reopening. This allows our attendees to participate in the worship service, experiencing visually the Pastor delivering the sermon and live music, making the worship service more meaningful. We will conduct these services from the Church with only the Pastor and those people involved in the service in attendance. Congregants will continue to worship from the safety of their home in a family setting. Bulletins will be sent through email with a link to view the service on your electronic device (phone, tablet or laptop). A phone number for those wishing to worship in an audio setting only will be included in the email. The video streaming and audio only capabilities will continue throughout the remaining stages of reopening as well as after we return to “normal”. We will monitor the use of the streaming and audio services and make a decision to go forward if worshipers continue to use this service.

4. Limited congregants in the Fellowship Hall

We will begin face to face worship when: the Virginia Conference and the Virginia government allows and preparations discussed in this plan have been accomplished. Attendees must adhere to the rules stated in this document such as wearing of masks and social distancing. Ushers will control entrance, seating and egress at all times. Additionally, signs will be posted directing people to the appropriate door for entering or exiting. Initially seating will be in the fellowship hall only, seating will be limited to 24 people and the service projected on the large screen TV. Bulletins will be distributed via email and all attendees are encouraged to print the bulletin and bring it with them. Call in and streaming video instructions will also be in that email.

5. Limited congregants in Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary

Face to face worship will be expanded to include both the Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary when allowed by the Conference and Virginia government. As stated above, attendees must adhere to the rules stated in this document such as wearing of masks and social distancing. Ushers will control entrance, seating and egress of all. Signs will be posted to help in directing entrance and exit from the Church. Worship services in the Fellowship Hall will be projected on the large screen TV. Bulletins will be distributed via email and all attendees are encouraged to print the bulletin and bring it with them.

6. Relaxation of social distancing requirements

When allowed by the Conference and the Virginia government, we will relax the social distance requirement in the sanctuary but will set up the fellowship hall for those wishing to adhere to social distancing guidelines. Ushers will assist congregants entering and exiting the Church. Signage will be posted to help direct entering and exiting the Church. When attendees are comfortable with relaxing social distancing, we will reset the Fellowship Hall to accommodate food services.

7. Cease broadcast to Fellowship Hall

When the Fellowship Hall is no longer needed for Worship services, we will cease broadcast in the Hall but will still broadcast both in audio and video over the internet and phone lines.

8. Continue audio and video broadcasts as participants warrant

Broadcasting over the internet and phone line will continue until we do not have anyone worshipping with us in this manner. If popular, this could remain for months or years, allowing us yet another way to welcome people to our family.

Sec 3. Preparation for Reopening

Needed preparations consist of preparing the building, adding technical capability, and communicating the plan.

Sec 3.1 Preparing the Church Building

The Fellowship Hall will be set up following all Conference guidelines to allow attendees to be in the safest environment for a church service. It will be transmitted live from the Sanctuary via video on a TV.

1. Carpets and all area rugs will be professionally cleaned.
2. Tables will be removed and placed in the storage room.
3. Chairs will be arranged 6' apart for social distancing
4. During service in fellowship hall
 - a. Kitchen doors will be closed
 - b. Classroom doors will be closed
 - c. Office door will be closed
 - d. Storage room will be closed
 - e. Door to Narthex will be closed.
5. Water fountain will be turned off
6. Limited use of bathrooms. One person per time - a sign will be posted for Occupied. Pump soap and paper towel dispenser available for hand washing.
7. Prior to each building use, high touch areas will be wiped down.

8. HVAC filters will be checked often and changed as needed.

9. The main entry door of the church will be taped off to eliminate entrance. In an emergency all exit doors will be operational.

Sec 3.2. Technical preparations

Purpose: to be able to continue to supply phone-in audio when speaking from the church, to stream live services to a large TV in the fellowship hall and to stream live services via internet for those at home.

Equipment needed includes:

- Wifi hotspot
- Wifi antenna (outside)
- Wifi signal amplifier
- Internal signal antenna
- Large Screen TV mounted on wall in Fellowship Hall
- HD camera with tripod (Earl provides initially)
- Various cords between equipment
- Laptop (Frank provides initially)

The cost for the above equipment is estimated to be \$1500.

Time frame to set up internet is 10 days. This allows us to continue the phone-in service when the Pastor works from Mt Pleasant Sanctuary.

Set up video equipment is an additional 7 days. Set up streaming services is another 7 days. This allows us to listen and view services from the fellowship hall and from our homes via the internet.

Sec 3.3 Communicating the Plan

Once approved, the plan is to be communicated to every church member, occasional attendees, and to friends of Mt Pleasant Church. Best practices for ensuring everyone gets the information they need is to communicate in every reasonable way. To that end the document should be:

- Published via email to all on our email lists,
- Printed and made available to all members and regular attendees without email,
- Summarized in the Church Newsletter with progress reports in each newsletter until fully open,
- Shared with Mineral UMC with a request that they make it available to all those who may be interested,
- Posted on the Mt Pleasant web site, and

- Announced in at least 2 weekly Conference Call Services after approval.

Notes will be posted on entry doors announcing services. The following announcement may be used for possible publication in the central Virginian or sharing with friends on Facebook or other means:

After weeks of shut-down due to COVID-19, Mt Pleasant United Methodist Church is anxious to return to regular services in its historic sanctuary but only when it is safe to do so. To that end Mt Pleasant UMC has developed a phased plan for how and when services may resume and restrictions that will apply as we gradually move to open attendance. The plan details how services progress from current phone-in conference calls, to live streamed services, to organized and socially distanced services, and finally to regular worship. The plan can be found at www.praywithyou.org.

Sec 4. Rules for Reopening

There are many rules for churches meeting again. Some driven by the Governor of the Commonwealth and some by the Bishop of the United Methodist Church. This section consolidates and highlights rules that apply to Mt Pleasant and to which we plan to adhere. It then presents the seating plan driven by those rules and the implications on food service.

Sec 4.1 Individual safety

The safety and well-being of everyone attending services at Mt Pleasant UMC is the number one priority. It cannot be overstated that this is an issue of life and death and as such, we all have a duty to follow a regimented process that protects everyone from contracting COVID-19. We cannot guarantee anyone's safety but the plans in this document minimize the risks in returning to worship at the church.

to safely return to in-person worship, we must limit the number of people attending in the beginning. As transition continues, the number can be increased as safety permits. If after attending an in-person service, an attendee tests positive for COVID-19, we will revert to transition Stage 1, all members and potential attendees must be notified, and a return to at least two phone-in only services should occur prior to resumption of in-person services.

On the day of the service, if you are sick for any reason, please stay home. Before leaving your home to attend service, each attendee must be sure their temperature is less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit. You should be prepared to be without access to the church's restrooms unless it is an emergency. All persons, especially those age 65 and older and others at risk due to health conditions, should be reminded that it is safer to participate from home than by in-person attendance. No one should feel obligated to attend in person during the pandemic. If anyone is exposed to COVID-19 or has symptoms, they should self-quarantine and isolate for at least 14 days after the last possible exposure to the virus.

Violators of mandatory safety measures will be asked to leave immediately. Their failure to do so will result in the termination of the service and closure of the church. Here are the rules:

- If you are sick you must stay home
- Everyone will be required to wear a face covering the entire time in the service.

- Disposable gloves should be worn by greeters, ushers, communion helpers if any, and counters
- Sanitizer stations will not be available for members and guests
- Strict physical distancing will be observed, 6 feet or more at all times
- Family members who have been together are not required to be 6 feet apart.
- Hymn books and Bibles will be removed and stored
- No choir
- No group singing
- No Sunday School
- No children under 10
- Digital bulletin, please print at home before you come to church
- No nursery or children's time
- No coffee or fellowship time until it is felt to be safe to begin them
- No handshaking or hugging
- Drop-off offering only, no passing of the plates
- No Communion in the beginning, later pre-packaged only until safe to return to normal Communion
- No baptisms
- No weddings
- No funerals
- Physical distancing of 6 feet or more during dismissal
- Parking will be as always, but do not congregate in the parking lot, maintain 6 feet separation
- Seating will be in accordance with the developed plan to keep social distancing of 6 feet.
- MPUMC has a security plan in place which serves as a back up to this plan.

Because we plan to monitor our progress as we go about reopening our church, it may be necessary to adjust and edit our protocols and procedures.

Sec 4.2 Facility Related Rules

Additional rules will guide opening our facilities:

- There are no parking space restrictions for in-person worship. Distancing rules of 6 ft apply once you exit your car until you return to your car. Do not congregate in the parking lot.
- Face coverings are required from the time you leave your vehicle until you return to your vehicle.
- Entrance to the church will be through the deck door into the fellowship hall; the main entrance will remain locked. Exception is made for those worshipers that need to use the handicap ramp. They will be seated in the sanctuary and upon completion of the service will be ushered out. One space known as the Otho Neal pew in the front of the sanctuary will be reserved as handicap seating until the service is about to begin.
- Once the sanctuary is open for in-person seating, you will be escorted to the sanctuary. If the sanctuary is at capacity, then the usher will seat you in the fellowship hall. Capacity in the fellowship hall is based on seating that provides good visibility to the video service. There are spaces that have poor or no visibility to the broadcast but could accommodate an overflow person who was willing to hear but not see the broadcast. Overflow can also be accommodated by adding seats for couples at row ends.

- Upon completion of the service the Pastor and the Organist will be first to depart through the front door facing Mt Pleasant Church Rd. Worshipers in the sanctuary will then exit as directed by ushers.
- If you are worshipping in the fellowship hall, at the conclusion of the service the ushers will direct your orderly exit onto the deck.
- If you must use the restroom, only one person at a time is allowed in the restroom. Each user should wipe down high touch areas such as door knobs and faucet handles.

Sec 4.3 Gatherings Other Than Worship

This guidance fully applies to all gatherings at the church including church organizations like Men’s Group, Women’s Group, Administrative Council, and external organizations like Lake Anna Civic Association and homeowner’s associations.

Each organization that meets at the church has a church point of contact. That contact should be present during the meeting and ensure adherence in accordance with this handbook including wiping down high touch areas prior to use and upon exiting.

Points of contact for meetings other than worship should ensure all attendees are aware that they must adhere to the following:

- Face coverings required from the time you leave your vehicle until you return to your vehicle
- Physical distancing - 6 feet or more at all times
- Entrance to the church will be through the deck entrance into the fellowship hall; the main entrance will be locked at all times
- If you need to use the restrooms, one person at a time is allowed and must use sanitizer wipes on the faucet handles and door knobs upon exiting
- No food service other than personal drink containers
- Other than the fellowship hall and the bathrooms, all other rooms including the sanctuary are not to be used.

Sec 4.4 Choir, Singing, Group Prayers/Readings

Until the conference issues new guidance there will be:

- no meetings at the church for choir rehearsals
- no live performances by choir during worship services
- Congregation may hum along with music that is presented (i.e. hymns)
- Soloists are not permitted

- We will continue to explore methods of providing pre-recorded music for preludes, anthems and hymns
- We will be looking for new technology that will allow for remote access to rehearsals and potential to record choral music for anthems
- Group prayers will be voiced by a designated leader who will leave opportunities for silent prayers by all to address personal issues. No prayers in unison and aloud
- Readings will be voiced by a designated leader who will use social distancing and/or microphone so that they may be heard
- Only printed, disposable paper, will be used for readings, music, or lyrics
- No hymn books may be used. You may bring your own bible.

Sec 4.5 Seating Plan

Seating plans for both the sanctuary including the balcony and the fellowship hall have been developed. Social distancing of 6 ft will allow for comfortably seating 49 people in all seating areas. In the sanctuary the plan calls for 25 including the Pastor and the Organist. The fellowship hall can seat 24. A limited number of additional spaces in the fellowship hall are available (see the drawing) but the viewing angle and distance would make it difficult to fully enjoy the service. They are held in reserve in case we have greater than the expected number of attendees.

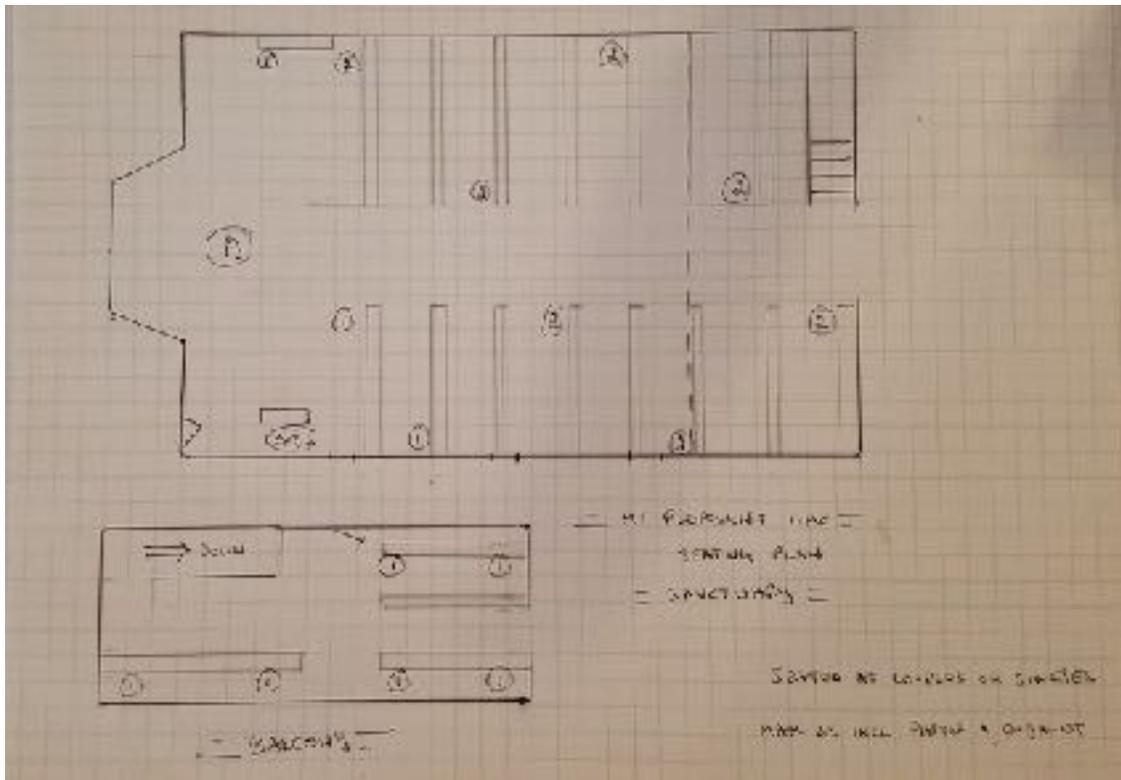
Since many attendees are couples who likely wish to worship together, our arrangement provides for couples spaces and for single spaces in the sanctuary (marked by a 1 or 2 on the layout). To the extent that singles occupy couple spaces the maximum capacity is reduced. The fellowship hall is laid out in individual chairs seated singly. It will be necessary to mark the location of chairs and of spaces in the pews in order to maintain distanced positions for all.

Spaces will be reserved for technicians near the front row and the balcony for recording and filming the services. Some extra distancing has been allowed for the Pastor and Organist to allow free movement during the service. The short pew at the front is designated for handicapped, but can be used if needed.

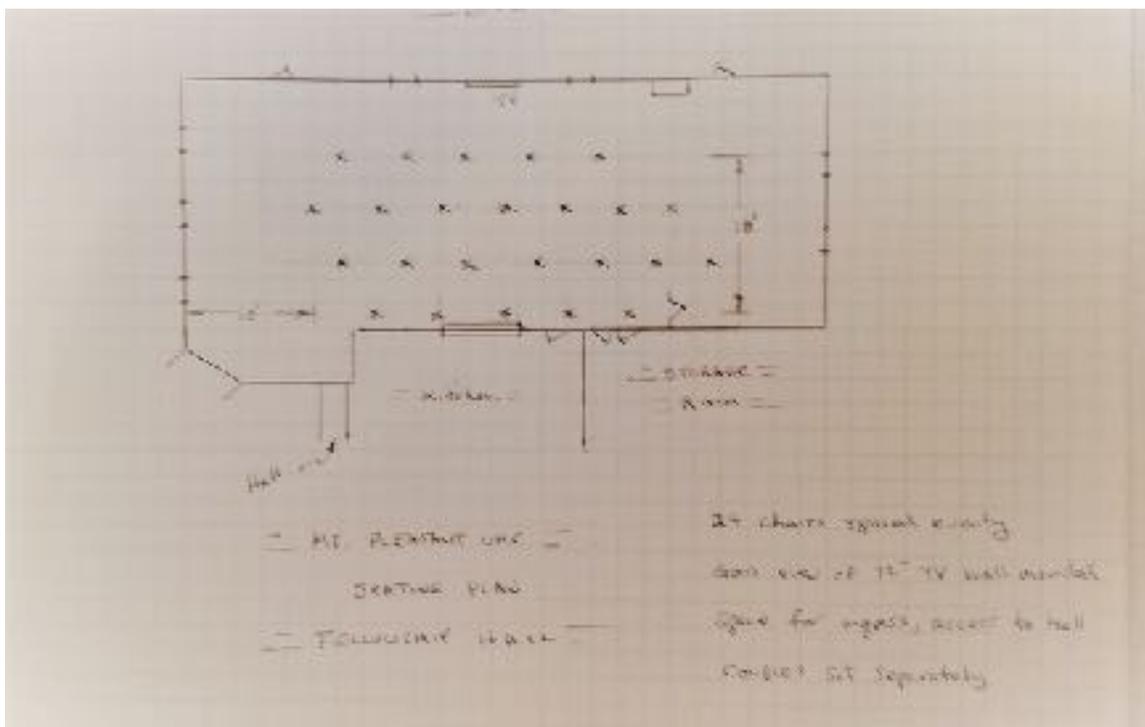
In the fellowship hall, space has been allowed for ingress/egress and late comers as well as access to the hallway and restrooms. Ingress to both the fellowship hall and the sanctuary is through the deck doors. Fellowship hall attendees exit as directed by ushers. Sanctuary participants exit through the front door (facing the road) with balcony participants exiting through the rear entrance as directed by ushers.

Usher(s) are expected to assist in both seating and exiting. Exiting early or for use of bathroom facilities is through the rear exit doors and risks a small compression of the 6 ft rule as the person exiting passes members on the aisle seat. Since this is such short duration it is felt that it is acceptable.

Drawings are not precisely to scale.



Sanctuary Seating



Fellowship Hall Seating

Sec 4.6 Resumption of food services

During the period when we have only audio worship and audio/video streaming services, no food or drinks will be served before, during, or after services.

We will resume limited food/drink services during the period when we have limited congregants in fellowship hall as well as when we have limited congregants in fellowship hall and sanctuary i.e. during the period of social distancing. Food/drink will be served on the deck (weather permitting only) and may include: coffee, juice, water and single servings of “sweets” prewrapped. All food and drink will be served by volunteers, with no self-service.

A full offering of food in Fellowship Hall will occur when our congregants feel comfortable and the Conference allows the relaxation of social distancing requirements. Food will again be served “buffet style” and coffee and juice will be self-serve. Initially, a table with coffee, juice, water, and single serving sweets served by a volunteer will be available for those uneasy with relaxation of distancing. This volunteer service table will be eliminated when congregants indicate that it is no longer needed.

Sec 5. Timing and Dependencies for Reopening

1. Governor Northam on June 2, 2020, issued Executive Order No. 65, effective June 5, moving much of the commonwealth into Phase Two of his Virginia Forward program. Phase Two includes mandatory safety requirements for religious services (see Part IV, Rules for Reopening). The Charlottesville district is included in that part of Virginia which is now in Phase Two.
2. Bishop Lewis had indicated that she would announce a move to a transition stage, including social distancing, for the Conference following the Commonwealth’s move to its Phase Two. She did, in fact, announce on June 3 that the Virginia Conference would move to that next stage as of Sunday, June 21.
3. Churches with average attendance of less than 50 may reopen based on the bishop’s announcement. Larger churches will be identified and solicited by their district superintendents and approved based on their cleaning and communication plans. MPUMC may appeal to the district superintendent to reopen as soon as its reopening plan is finalized.
4. Due to technical issues with the installation of live streaming video and internet technologies and the need to perfect simultaneous conference call and in-person services, the actual date of MPUMC’s reopening will be some weeks after June 21. A limited reopening with worshippers in the fellowship hall only could occur as early as Sunday, July 5, with a full reopening using both the sanctuary and fellowship hall on July 12 or 19.

5. The timing of the governor's declaring a subsequent move to Phase Three for Virginia and Bishop Lewis' announcing a move to the "New Normal" for the Conference is currently unknowable. It will depend on the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe it is likely to be months instead of weeks before the social distancing restrictions are lifted for MPUMC. Planning to have unrestricted worship for Advent and Christmas services would be a reasonable expectation.

Sec 6. Process for Reopening Related Decisions

As a Methodist Church we are governed by the Charlottesville District and the Virginia Conference. The Virginia Conference has issued guidance for reopening found at www.vaumc.org/return. Within that we are expected to develop our own reopening plan which will be reviewed by the District Superintendent. In order to develop the plan for return to regular services, Pastor Davies has created three planning teams for the Mineral-Mt Pleasant Charge.

- Team 1 - Mineral Preparation focused on "Nuts and Bolts" of reopening including technology needed at Mineral Church
- Team 2 - Mt Pleasant Preparation focused on "Nuts and Bolts" plus preserving the Conference Call worship
- Team 3 - Worship and other creative challenges focused on improving worship experiences as we transition

Team 2 is tasked with developing our plan for returning to regular services. Team 2 recommendations will be contained in a documented plan that will be presented to the Mt Pleasant Administrative Council for approval. Upon Council approval the plan will be submitted to the District Superintendent at least 10 days prior to implementation. Team 2 will then revise the plan if changes are made in the approval process.

Once implementation has begun, changes to the plan may be done by simple revision, return to Team 2 for rework, or decided by the Administrative Council at the discretion of the Pastor.