



Grace United Methodist Church - Joliet

COVID-19 Pandemic ReTurn Team Plan



As of: January 26, 2021

GUMC ReTurn Health Team Members:

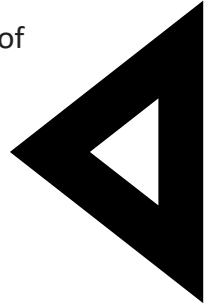
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NOTE: This document has been reviewed by the Northern Illinois Conference, Pastors Fritz Bartels and Romir Esguerra, and the GUMC Church Council



Introduction

In the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, activities that have been an essential part of what the Church is and how the Church operates suddenly possess the real possibility of contributing to the spread of the virus. In such times of crisis, people of faith look to the church for comfort and guidance and to be a beacon of hope and new life in the face of difficulty and despair.

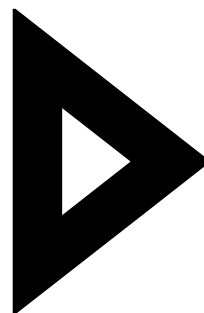


Thus, in cooperation with and at the direction of church and government authorities, the Northern Illinois Conference (NIC) ReTurn Team was assembled to investigate and recommend protocols the Church must follow to mitigate the number of people infected.

This document is intended to provide best practices into a series of phases by which local churches can assess their current situation. After a thorough evaluation, the local church can determine the best path forward or, if necessary, revert to a previous level.

One of the first things each church can do is to form a Health Team or designate a group that will be responsible to make decisions and implement specific return plans for each congregation. The ReTurn Team advises all churches to complete each step and resist shortcuts. The ReTurn Team also encourages each church's pastor and lay leadership covenant to resist social, economic and cultural pressures to reopen the church too soon and put lives at risk.

The following guidelines and plans must be applied contextually with discernment. What may be safe for one church may not be safe for another. Churches will move through these phases at different paces in accordance with their local health officials and their members' self-reported exposure to COVID-19.



Introduction (continued)

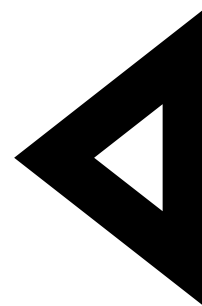
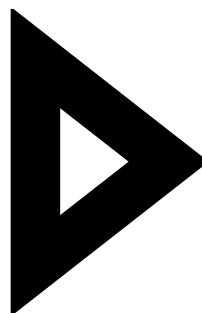
In addition, as we evaluate available information, we also issue the caution that in-person church-related activities may well be one of the last pieces of social interaction to be fully reinstated. The Church must face hard realities about many of our churches, including:

- An aging population that has an elevated risk of infection;
- Lack of physical space to allow for proper social distancing
- Lack of resources to properly prepare worship, meeting and administrative space between gatherings.

The financial cost of meeting requirements for cleaning, sanitizing, and personal protection to reinstate in-person ministry in each phase should be considered. As a result, we urge the expansion of remote discipleship, online worship, online giving, and virtual ministry as part of a long-term discipleship strategy.

Finally, it is our prayer that the Church views this current challenge through the eyes of faith. As United Methodists, the First General Rule (Do No Harm) should be the primary consideration for any activity. We encourage theological reflection and commend the metaphors that bring us closer to the story of the wilderness journey of the Hebrew people in Exodus where they were formed into a new people; the story of the flood that devastated the earth and how Noah had to patiently read the signs before opening the doors to the ark and allowing the creatures in his care to exit and re-inhabit the earth, as well as other examples of God's people enduring hardship and trial. We turn to the stories of our faith to see how God moves us from orientation to disorientation to reorientation as part of God's creating work that began in a garden with two persons and ends with worship with the great cloud of witnesses.

ReTurn Team and the NIC Cabinet



PLAN STRUCTURE

The NIC ReTurn Team Plan is organized according to the five phases of "Restore Illinois," Governor JB Pritzker's public health approach to safely reopen the state of Illinois. [Click here to view the full plan](#) or visit coronavirus.il.gov.

NIC encompasses all or part of the North Central and Northeast Restore Illinois health regions numbered.

Considerations, absolute guidelines based on CDC and IDPH restrictions, and best practices are presented for each phase and may carry over from phase to phase.

Phase 1 – Rapid Spread

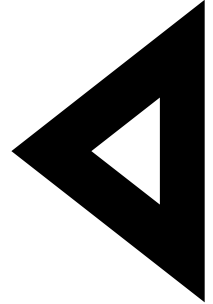
Every region has experienced this phase once already and could return to it if mitigation efforts are unsuccessful.

Phase 2 – Flattening

Phase 3 – Recovery

Phase 4 – Revitalization

Phase 5 - Restoration



CATEGORIES OF CONCERN

Ten specific areas of concern need to be addressed by all congregations as they move through each phase:

psychological impacts - manage expectations, prepare for future

building preparations - evaluate space, cleaning procedures, supplies, capacity, and signage

worship - weekly worship plans, offering

vulnerable populations - accommodations for online worship

spiritual formation/small groups - children's ministry, youth ministry, VBS, Bible study

administration - staff, office hours, committee meetings, rehearsals

ministries - church ministries, vital ministries (space sharers)

pastoral care - home visitations, institutional visits, lay visitation

special events - community events, fundraisers, dinner, potlucks, funerals, weddings, rentals

outreach - home groups/meetings, reaching new people, maintaining new online connections



PHASE 1 – RAPID SPREAD

Strict stay-at-home and social distancing guidelines in place and only essential businesses remain open.

ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

Organizing structure

- A GUMC ReTurn Health Team is formed to monitor ongoing situations and develop, implement, and monitor guidelines. Three trustees are included in ReTurn Team conversations and planning.

Building usage

- Building is closed to all gatherings and groups; this is noted in communications and signage. This includes events, space rentals, weddings and funerals.
- USPS, website, voicemail and social media updates indicate building closure, online worship and how to reach pastor. Congregants are informed of building closure via letter.
- Deemed an essential health service, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meets with safety guidelines strictly in place.
- No external cleaning company is used during this phase.
- Entry to the building is limited to essential personnel (staff and trustees) who will use proper PPE.
- A written log tracks building access.
- During the shut-down, GUMC is properly secured with periodic inspections of the church building and property by individual trustees and staff.
- Phones are forwarded to church office manager's personal phone.
- Staff works from home and meets virtually.
- Non-contact infrared thermometers are available for check-in use.

Worship

- GUMC leaders explore and identify the best platform for online services.
- Order of worship is emailed before each online service.
- Older and younger youth bulletins and activities are emailed weekly and posted on FaceBook.
- Children's sermons and ways to involve youth in online worship are developed.
- Worship is recorded, incorporating taped contributions from members, and streamed on FaceBook live (or an alternate virtual platform) each week with archived sessions saved on YouTube and links sent to congregation.
- YouTube recording links are emailed.
- Music is included in all online worship.
- Members are encouraged to provide assistance for online worship access as needed by the Grace community
- A spiritual element of worship is to respond to God's grace through giving of our resources. These resources are magnified through consecration to God's purpose. Encouragement to remain faithful to our gifts will be continued through Virtual worship.

- Faithful tithing and pledges are encouraged through USPS, exterior lockbox, and through electronic link (VANCO) at www.graceumcjoliet.org.
- Gifts received online or via mail or lockbox are consecrated during the online service. Quarterly statements are sent to all contributing individuals. Giving is monitored on a regular basis.

Communications

- Church hours (phone coverage) is Monday – Friday from 9am – 3pm.
- Church newsletters and email blasts are used to communicate cancellations/changes of events.
- Online giving is promoted via church website, email reminders, FaceBook posts and mentioned during online worship. Instructions for giving app are posted on church website and FaceBook.
- Information is posted (via monthly e-newsletter, website, outside signage, FaceBook and email) about how to contact the church office, and how to join virtual worship.
- Upper Room is available in literature box (outside church). Periodic devotionals may be emailed to the congregation.
- Grace Notes (newsletter) is emailed (mailed via USPS to those without emails or upon request) and is available in the outdoor box.
- Updates are communicated clearly to shared space groups including: AA (essential), and scouts (nonessential). Grace Child Care operates in the GUMC building and follows DCFS guidelines and regulations.
- A community care team is established to communicate with the Grace faith community to provide prayer, assurance, Christian love and support.
- Members reach out electronically or by phone or USPS to members of the Grace faith community, new guests, friends, etc. identified during online worship (Grace Community Care Team).

Fellowship, Education and Committees

- Committees are to meet via virtual platforms.
- Fellowship gatherings are organized via virtual platforms (restaurant club, investment club, etc).
- Virtual study groups/Sunday School classes/discussion groups are developed.
- Leaders investigate and develop online faith building experiences for Children and youth.

Ministries

- Leaders provide all ReTurn Team guidelines and building usage policies to ministry groups and work with them to consider if they can operate at all (within guidelines) in Phase I. Revised and updated policies will be distributed.
- Only those ministries deemed essential services meet at Grace UMC.

Pastoral care

- Pastor reaches out to the Grace faith community in non-person-to-person contact to address needs and concerns and collaborates with the Grace Community Care Team to address prayer concerns, emergencies, and to provide spiritual support and prayer to the Grace faith community.
- Prayers for those in need are shared with permission during online service and are included in the order of worship.

Staff and Support

- Staff works from home as much as possible.
- Additional direction and expectations are conveyed to staff for teleworking.
- Pastor provides regular staff meeting by virtual platform to address concerns, teambuilding, and planning.

ReTurn Team's considerations and actions for moving beyond Phase 1

- Plan to move to **Phase 2** is shared with the District Superintendent.
- Additional considerations may be identified based upon the psychological impacts and needs of the faith community.
- GUMC leaders gather information on the local health guidelines and evaluate the congregation's ability to adhere to community recommendations.
- Evaluate the need and efficacy to continue virtual ministries
- Although some activities may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial. GUMC implements a discernment process using prayer and meditation to provide the safest and healthiest environment for its faith community.
- Evaluate phase changes and restrictions if infection numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to the congregation.
- If a building user is confirmed positive for COVID-19, communicate per NIC/CDC/IDPH guidelines, and implement contact tracing with local health authorities.

PHASE 2 - Flattening

Vulnerable individuals continue to stay at home, physical distancing guidelines must be followed, non-essential travel and meetings are discouraged. Schools are shut down.

ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

Building usage

- Staff and trustees are notified (with appropriate training) regarding new guidelines and procedures for logging entry to building and self-check. If someone's temperature is above 99.6 degrees fahrenheit or they feel sick, they should leave after signing the log.
- Any staff and essential volunteers are required to take temperature, log it along with their name, time, reason for visit and area they will be working in, and time of departure. Masks are worn unless person is alone in building. If more than one person is in building, social distancing must be followed.
- Non-contact infrared thermometers are available.
- ReTurn Team visits church to determine capacity for each room based upon social distancing calculator.
- Library is prepared to use as quarantine area in case someone shows symptoms of being sick after entering the building. Need to replace cloth chairs with plastic chairs.
- ReTurn Team assess space use and communicate to groups using space.
- Inventory of PPE and cleaning supplies and supplies are maintained by office manager.
 - Supplies in cabinet at back of sanctuary (PPE, towels, and sanitizer) and in work room and office manager to replenish.
- Conduct a ReTurn Team walk-through to identify any guideline difficulties.
- Non-essential groups will not meet in the church and no in-person worship will be conducted.
- AA is considered an essential healthcare group.
- Any meetings inside must be coordinated with church office manager.
- Online services, Sunday School, Confirmation, and virtual fellowship and committee meetings are continued.
- Trustees and staff with essential business utilize an informal staggered schedule to assure social distancing.
- Hand sanitizer stations are set up at main entrance and in office. Additional stations will be added for later phases.
- Posted guidelines direct anyone who becomes sick in the building to take it upon themselves to log out and leave.

Worship

- Worship is recorded, incorporating taped contributions from members, and streamed on FaceBook Live each week with archived sessions saved on YouTube and links sent to congregation.

- Communion is served at the pastor's discretion. The pastor will bless the sacraments and conduct a drive-through distribution of individually wrapped communion elements in the church parking lot.
- Gifts received online or via mail or lockbox are consecrated during the online service. Quarterly statements are sent to all contributing individuals.

Communications

- Church hours (phone coverage) remain Monday – Friday from 9am – 3pm.
- Communication is made with all staff, trustees and groups (AA, Scouts and Grace Day Care) regarding new guidelines and procedures.
- Care Committee communicates changes. Communications with church members are conducted to provide and encourage congregational feedback, support, concerns regarding online worship.

Pastoral Care

- There are no in-person pastoral visits. Pastor reaches out to the Grace faith community in non-person-to-person contact to address needs and concerns.
- The Pastor contacts visitors and others identified by the care team via phone and email.
- The Grace faith community is encouraged to reach out to each other and to those in need via mail, email, and phone.

Ministries

- Leaders assess whether all ministry groups are in compliance with ReTurn Team guidelines and building usage policies. Office manager to assure anyone scheduled to use building has list of procedures to be followed. Groups should meet in Grace Place/other space to accommodate cleaning of chairs, tables, etc. No meetings should take place in sanctuary.

Fellowship, Education and Committees

- Virtual fellowship and education opportunities continue.
- Virtual committee meetings continue.
- Teams and methods help maintain connections within the church family.

Staff and Support

- Staff have adequate resources to continue to work from home and meet virtually.
- Private offices provide sufficient social distancing.
- Plexiglass dividers are ordered for desks in shared workspaces.
- Staggered work hours for staff and essential volunteers are followed.
- Staff roles, responsibilities, and job descriptions (including volunteers where applicable) are reviewed and clearly defined.
- Guidelines and protocols for building usage are provided for staff and volunteers to follow.
- ReTurn team provides additional protocols for concerns of noncompliance.

ReTurn Team considerations and actions for moving beyond PHASE 2

- Plan to move to [Phase 3](#) is shared with the District Superintendent.
- Additional considerations may be identified based upon the psychological impacts and needs of the faith community.
- ReTurn Team continues to monitor progress.
- GUMC leaders gather information on the local health guidelines and evaluate the congregation's ability to adhere to community recommendations.
- A point person is designated (Trustees Chair) to implement context-specific guidelines, paying special attention to what is happening in the regions where the church operates. Prayer and discernment are utilized actions appropriate to the Grace Faith Community.
- Guideline must be determined for formal membership acceptance, baptism and confirmation ceremonies. Membership in the church is part of a worship service requiring vows of those joining, and those witnessing. This is also true of baptism and confirmation. These ceremonies require an intimacy that is not available virtually. Those elements would be the laying on of hands and close contact, water, etc. Special liturgical scripts are used as part of our Methodist heritage.
- Although some activities may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial. GUMC implements a discernment process using prayer and meditation to provide the safest and healthiest environment for its faith community.
- Congregations and church leaders should see this as a discernment process. Although some activities may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial. GUMC implements a discernment process using prayer and meditation to provide the safest and healthiest environment for its faith community.
- If numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to anyone who has been in our building, leaders may need to move back to more stringent restrictions.
- If a building user is confirmed positive for COVID-19, communicate per guidelines and clean areas appropriately.

PHASE 3 – RECOVERY

Vulnerable individuals continue to shelter in place. Gatherings <10 people allowed. Face coverings and social distancing are the norm. Travel and meetings may resume with special accommodations to ensure the health and safety for the vulnerable. Schools and daycares may reopen. Senior living facilities and hospitals visits are prohibited. Manufacturing, offices, retail, barbershops/salons can reopen to the public with capacity limits and safety precautions. Telework is encouraged.

ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

Organizational Structure

- The ReTurn Team continues to monitor progress.

Building usage

- All continue to use main entrance and Grace Place restrooms and log in/out.
- All who enter the church are required to wear masks and practice social distancing. Masks are available for everyone 2 years and older. Office manager assures inventory and availability of masks and cleaning supplies.
- All who enter the building must log in, check temperature, and wear a mask. If someone's temperature is above 99.6 degrees fahrenheit or they feel sick, they should leave after signing the log.
- Signage is posted on floors and windows to direct social distancing.
- Each group of <10 people meeting is instructed to sanitation protocols of meeting area with provided materials.
- Utilization of the outdoor pavilion is encouraged when possible.
- The cleaning crew sanitizes and disinfects all spaces. A cleaning schedule is developed based upon planned usage.
- Continue to monitor space usage to ensure a limited number of people is allowed in the same space during a limited amount of time.
- Occupancy for each room, based on social distancing needs, is posted.
- Community events, fundraisers, dinners/potlucks, and space rentals remain on hold.
- Weddings, funerals and baptisms take place with a 10-person limit (including staff) and follow IDPH guidelines at the discretion of the pastor.
- Office should be kept locked at all times.

Communications

- Church hours (phone coverage) remain Monday – Friday from 9am – 3pm.
- Outdoor GUMC signage and website indicate online worship on FaceBook Live (or other virtual platform).

- Member-to-member coaching and assistance continue to assure virtual ministries are accessible to all.
- Members reach out electronically or by phone or USPS to members of the Grace faith community, new guests, friends, etc. identified during online worship (Grace Community Care Team).

Worship

- Worship is recorded, incorporating taped contributions from members, and streamed on FaceBook live each week with archived sessions saved on YouTube and links sent to congregation.
- Communion is served at the pastor's discretion. The pastor will bless the sacraments and conduct a drive-through distribution of individually wrapped communion elements in the church parking lot.
- For any recording done in the sanctuary, participants must follow social distancing, limit the handling of microphones and equipment and sanitize equipment before and after use. All recording equipment use must be coordinated through the AV team.
- Open windows and prop open doors in sanctuary, when possible, to open air flow. Do not turn overhead fans on; exhaust fan is ok.
- Online giving emphasis continues. Gifts received online or via mail or lockbox are consecrated during the online service. Quarterly statements are sent to all contributing individuals.
- Vulnerable populations are assisted as needed to assure access to virtual worship service.

Fellowship, Education and Committees

- Committees are encouraged to work and meet via Zoom.
- Availability of virtual Christian education (VBS, Sunday School, etc.) experience (for families to participate at home) is promoted if in-person education is not allowed.

Pastoral Care

- Pastor reaches out to the Grace faith community in non-person-to-person contact to address needs and concerns.
- Online worship attendance is monitored noting who is new to the church (or former member) and reaching out to them is encouraged.

Ministries

- Leaders assess whether all ReTurn Team guidelines and building usage policies are and can be followed by each ministry group.

Staff and Support

- Staff may return to work on a limited and staggered schedule with social distancing. Plexiglass is installed as needed in office and at reception window.
- Access to office is limited to staff and essential volunteers only.
- Protocols are provided for staff and volunteers regarding guidelines and best practices.
- ReTurn Team Plan to become an addendum to GUMC emergency plan.

ReTurn Team considerations and actions to move beyond Phase 3

- Plan to move to [Phase 4](#) is shared with the District Superintendent.
- Additional considerations for the ReTurn Plan may be identified based upon the needs of the faith community.
- ReTurn Team continues to monitor progress.
- GUMC leaders gather information on the local health guidelines and evaluate the congregation's ability to adhere to community recommendations.
- The need to install plexiglass shield in front of the pulpit is considered.
- Additional technology may be added to improve accessibility (FM Transmitter).
- Continue to discern the needs and capacity of GUMC rather than following the lead of other congregations.
- Children's Sunday school may continue virtually.
- Use patience and wisdom, prioritizing the health and safety of the congregation, staff and community. Although some things may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial.
- Congregations and church leaders should see this as a discernment process. Although some activities may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial. GUMC implements a discernment process using prayer and meditation to provide the safest and healthiest environment for its faith community.
- If numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to anyone who has been in our building, leaders may need to move back to more stringent restrictions.
- If a building user is confirmed positive for COVID-19, communicate per guidelines, and clean areas appropriately.

PHASE 4 - REVITALIZATION

Accommodations should be in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable individuals. Face coverings and social distancing are the norm and time in crowded environments should be minimized. Restaurants and bars reopen, travel resumes, childcare and schools reopen under IDPH guidance. Visits to senior living facilities and hospitals are still prohibited.

ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

Organizational Structure

- The ReTurn Team continues to monitor progress.

Check-in/Check-out process on church property (including worship attendance)

- Cars are parked in every other space if parking lot worship service is conducted.
- Anyone coming to GUMC property or entering the building (through the main entrance) must wear mask, use hand sanitizer, have temperature taken (self-test if alone; done by volunteers for worship), log their name, time, reason for visit and area of church they will be in, and time of departure. Hand sanitizer is available at entrance. All are required to wear their own masks. Masks are to be worn unless person is alone in building. If more than one person is in building, social distancing must be followed. A small number of replacement masks are available for anyone who forget theirs.
- Once logged in and with acceptable temperature of 99.6 or below, individuals proceed (with social distancing) to either their destination activity or to await worship sanctuary seating.
- If someone's temperature is above 99.6, they are isolated in the library and temperature will be retaken. If their temperature is still high, they will be guided (or directed) to exit the building when the entrance/library area is cleared. If they become ill while at the church/on property, they are directed to leave after logging out.

Building usage

- No one who is sick should enter the building.
- ReTurn team determines flow of "traffic" when large groups are in the building (e.g. for worship). All enter through main entrance and are directed to ushers who coordinate seating in sanctuary (for worship) or to room for meeting, activity, etc. Following activity, all are directed to leave the building/property. For worship, ushers dismiss by rows to facilitate social distancing.
- Office manager will manage maximum occupancy (to assure social distancing) and room assignments as well as direction for cleaning service as needed based upon usage. All scheduling of appointments and meetings should go through office manager.
- Cleaning supplies are provided so each group can clean/sanitize before and after they use materials, rooms, tables, etc.

- Meetings or classes may be conducted outdoors using the pavilion with social distancing guidelines and wearing of masks.
- Signage is posted throughout the property regarding guidelines, traffic flow, restrooms, social distancing, etc.
- Signage is posted on restroom doors to limit only one person in the restroom at a time.
- With exception of worship, the Grace Place restrooms are to be used. For worship, both restrooms will be available.
- Whenever possible, windows and doors are opened to increase ventilation. No overhead fans are used. Exhaust fan is ok.
- Cleaning staff clean regularly based upon schedule as determined by office manager.
- Ensure office and work spaces are modified to accommodate social distancing and/or safety guidelines.
- Installation is complete for plexiglass separation in office and work spaces are prepared including plexiglass separations as necessary.
- Trustees and ReTurn Team monitor building use and cleaning policies and schedule.

Communications

- Church hours (phone coverage) remain Monday – Friday from 9am – 3pm.
- Expectations, protocols and/or cancellations will be communicated via multiple methods, clearly and frequently.
- Identify new venues and methods to spread the word to the community about programs and ministries GUMC has to offer.
- Church members and staff continue to encourage connections and interaction via online networks and social media including: signage, newspaper listings, website, email, phone, FaceBook, Zoom.
- Any changes to process or guidelines are communicated.

Worship

- Online service recordings are available. Services are videotaped and posted online.
- Church leaders continually assess how the greater community is functioning and progressing so that GUMC may move ahead safely into “in-person” worship.
- ReTurn Team works with ushers to determine seating arrangements, process and sanctuary capacity. Ushers seat all congregants to assure physical distancing. Ushers also direct congregants following the service to ensure social distancing.
- Seating areas are held for those with wheelchairs and their families/caregivers.
- The AV Team cleans and disinfects assisted listening devices after use by congregants.
- Nursery services are not available.
- No congregational singing is allowed pending NIC and CDC guidelines. Pre-recorded music is used as well as organ/piano/bells/instrumentalists and vocal soloists (if properly protected – e.g. plexiglass, masks, etc.).
- Order of worship is communicated via screens. There are no bulletins.

- Online giving is encouraged. Offering plate/basket is placed at sanctuary entrance to collect offering. Ushers bring offering up to be blessed and then deliver to counters. Gifts received online, via mail or lockbox are consecrated during the service as well. Counting continues in same way it was done during previous phases.
- Communion is served at the pastor's discretion, via individually wrapped packets with notice to the congregation regarding the plan.
- Signage promotes expectations regarding physical distancing and encourages no-touch greetings.
- All bibles, hymnals, attendance pads, pens, etc. are removed from the pews. No children's packets will be available.
- While fellowship is a very important part of this church, congregation members are encouraged to disburse immediately following worship to ensure social distancing. New traditions/methods are encouraged for connecting and greetings.
- Weddings and funerals are limited to a capacity based upon the pastor's discretion depending upon pandemic status; PPE guidelines, social distancing, and guidelines followed.

Fellowship, Education and Committees

- Specific guidelines are set taking into account social distancing and safety protocols, for all bible studies, classes and meetings. Availability of virtual Christian education (VBS, Sunday School, etc.) experience (for families to participate at home) is promoted if in-person education is not allowed.
- No shared food or drink is served.
- Committees meet via Zoom or in person at the church or in the pavilion (masked and with social distancing).

Ministries

- Leaders assess whether all ReTurn Team guidelines and building usage policies are and can be followed by each ministry group.
- All ministries operate following social distancing and sanitizing guidelines.
- Each ministry leader(s) determines if ministries can operate under social distancing guidelines and whether or not harm may be caused if ministries resume.
- All space sharers are instructed to follow GUMC guidelines and building use protocols.

Pastoral Care

- Pastor reaches out to the Grace faith community in non-person-to-person contact to address needs and concerns.
- Consider adding budget for outreach and/or strengthening of virtual ministry.
- Identify new ways to deliver outreach and pastoral care if in-person visits cannot be made.

Staff and Support

- Staff may return to work on a limited and staggered schedule with social distancing. Plexiglass is installed as needed in office and at reception window.
- ReTurn Team Plans become an addendum to GUMC emergency plans
- Access to office is limited to staff and essential volunteers only.
- Office manager monitors PPE and cleaning supplies to match increased building use.

ReTurn Team considerations and actions for moving beyond Phase 4

- Plan to move to **Phase 5** is shared with District Superintendent.
- Additional considerations may be identified based upon the psychological impacts and needs of the faith community.
- Moving to public gatherings requires much consideration and planning and should be determined location by location. The realities of the specific region and local context may lead each church to make different decisions about when to gather. Consider the safety and needs of the most vulnerable in your community. It may be appropriate for churches to remain closed even as stores, businesses, restaurants, and organizations begin to open.
- GUMC leaders gather information on the local health guidelines and evaluate the congregation's ability to adhere to community recommendations.
- GUMC will be creative in thinking about the purpose and goal of worship and faith formation and how its ministries/programs might be modified to meet the challenges of this new reality.
- If special events are proposed, leaders will give serious consideration whether the need to gather exceeds the risk for becoming a "spreading event".
- The ReTurn Team and church leadership will consider surveying the congregation about their thoughts and concerns as they return to face-to-face worship, meetings, activities, and public gathering. Changes may be made accordingly based upon responses.
- Congregations and church leaders should see this as a discernment process. Although some activities may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial. GUMC implements a discernment process using prayer and meditation to provide the safest and healthiest environment for its faith community.
- If numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to anyone who has been in our building, leaders may need to move back to more stringent restrictions.
- If a building user is confirmed positive for COVID-19, communicate per guidelines, and clean areas appropriately.

PHASE 5 – RESTORATION

Testing, tracing and treatment are widely available throughout the state. Either a vaccine is developed to prevent additional spread of COVID-19, a treatment option is readily available that ensures health care capacity is no longer a concern, or there are no new cases over a sustained period. Public health experts focus on building out the public health infrastructure needed to meet and overcome future challenges. Healthcare equity is made a priority to improve health outcomes and ensure vulnerable communities receive the quality care they deserve. Large gatherings of all sizes can resume. All sectors of the economy reopen with new health and hygiene practices permanently in place. Sick people advised to stay home.

ABSOLUTE GUIDELINES

Organizational Structure

- ReTurn Team and church leadership continue to monitor progress.
- Review the ways in which the facility and its characteristics are an aid or an obstacle to ministry.
- Leaders assess whether all ReTurn Team guidelines and building usage policies are and can be followed by each ministry group.

Check-in/Check-out process on church property

- Assess whether check-in/check-out process is working and/or if changes need to be made.

Building usage

- Hand sanitizer is available at all entrances.
- Check-in/Check-out, safety, sanitizing and mask-wearing wellness protocols are enforced for all groups, ministries, and staff.

Worship

- Online worship access continues to be provided.
- Additional ways are conveyed to share the peace and greet each other.
- GUMC is a friendly congregation. Leaders communicate to help people become comfortable choosing whether to shake hands, bump elbows, etc. without stigmatization either way.
- Leaders assess and explore new ways of celebrating communion.
- Leaders determine if/when GUMC can safely sing together without causing harm.
- Leaders determine and communicate new hygiene practices to incorporate for GUMC and conduct further training if necessary.
- Leaders assess whether cleaning demands can be met given current staffing and schedules.
- Leaders assess how screen-only order of worship is working vs providing bulletins and hymnals or asking people to bring their own hymnals.
- Online giving continues to be encouraged. Gifts (received in person, online, via mail or lockbox) are consecrated during the service. Quarterly statements are sent to all contributing individuals.

Communications

- Clear and open communication is encouraged to monitor the health and well-being of those using the building/property or participating in ministries.
- Best practices (based on the new “norms”) are reassessed and established for GUMC committees and staff to function and communicated to the faith community.

Fellowship, Education and Committees

- All spaces and materials used for spiritual formation gatherings (Bible study, children’s/youth ministries) are cleaned depending upon use.
- Strong online connections with community groups and developed and creative ways to reach out virtually are explored.
- GUMC offers both in-person and virtual options to meet with people and develop new relationships.

Pastoral Care

- Pastoral or lay visits begin with time limits on visits and observance of best hygiene practices.
- Clear visitation policies are evaluated per current guidelines.

Staff and Support

- Church office hours continue as Monday – Friday from 9am – 3pm with in-person coverage.
- Consultation with conference attorney/liability providers regarding risk reviews as needed.
- Staffing levels, job descriptions and responsibilities are assessed given the new “norms” to determine if changes need to be made.
- Training is provided for staff and volunteers regarding hygiene best practices and how to manage wellness issues or a person’s failure to follow guidelines.
- Opportunities for greater community involvement are explored.
- Evaluate the use of technology to strengthen the church and its outreach and engagement.
- New guidelines for food service (as issued by Will County Health Department) are followed.

ReTurn Team considerations/actions for moving beyond Phase 5 and determining what the new “normal” looks like

- Additional considerations may be identified based upon the psychological impacts and needs of the faith community.
- ReTurn Team considers what changes will be maintained, what can return to pre-pandemic norms, and why. Assess building and usage based on the new “norms” and our congregation to determine if it meet the needs of at-risk members?
- Congregations must be led to adapt to the new health and hygiene practices that are implemented.
- GUMC leaders gather information on the local health guidelines and evaluate the congregation’s ability to adhere to community recommendations.
- Ongoing vigilance will be necessary.
- Continued virtual worship and ministry enables more people to participate in a variety of ways.
- Incorporate new norms and guidelines into existing church policies and practices.
- Consider how leadership becomes aware of vulnerable population and how this is handled based upon individual’s involvement in worship, classes, activities and access.
- Determine if online worship should be continued and/or augmented.
- Consider how long we require login/check-in procedures to be followed or changed and masks to be worn.
- Determine ways to assure members are comfortable (able to deal with) the strict social distancing and safety guidelines.
- Before fully opening, assess GUMC’s ability to follow hygiene and sanitation best practices from IDPH and CDC.
- Congregations and church leaders should see this as a discernment process. Although some activities may be permitted by others, that does not always mean that they are beneficial. GUMC implements a discernment process using prayer and meditation to provide the safest and healthiest environment for its faith community.
- If numbers begin to increase or if exposure is immediate to anyone who has been in our building, leaders may need to move back to more stringent restrictions.
- If a building user is confirmed positive for COVID-19, communicate per guidelines, and clean areas appropriately.
- Add statement to log/self-disclosure, “Have you traveled to another state/hot zone?”.

New considerations for ReTurn Plan – back to normal?

- *Shaking hands*
- *Communion/sacraments*
- *Use of bulletins*
- *Hymnals*
- *Passing offering plate*
- *Taking temperatures at the door*
- *Opening nursery*
- *Singing together*

- *Fellowship time*
- *Food & drink*
- *Are masks required*
- *Maximum number of people*
- *Wellness policy enforced/policy for those who are sick*
- *Special events held*