

First Baptist Church's Five-Stage COVID-19 Response Plan

[This has been approved by the FBC Elders and Moderator, as well as affirmed by the staff on May 5, 2020. The Officers will gather on May 11, 2020 to further discuss and work through unforeseen details.]

This is a stage-driven plan and not a date-driven plan. While targeted dates are a part of this plan, all dates remain fluid and will be based on the stage of recovery we are in according to our community partnership, unless there is a time when we discern that what is best for our church requires independent decisions apart from these existing partnerships.

To accomplish the mission and vision of our church, we will always seek to discern a word from the Lord and submit to God's directions, whenever and wherever possible, as long as it is within the direction we discern from the Lord, we will seek to partner with our community.

The elders and leaders of FBC respect and trust the autonomous decision making authority of every born again believer and of those called by God to be parents and grandparents who have responsibility over their families. We request that all your decisions be made through prayer and with a mindset of graciousness and love for your neighbor. With that in mind, we ask you to please remember the words of the Apostle Peter from 1 Peter 5:5-7 (ESV), "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

We are called by God to lead you as servant shepherds, not with a heavy-handed or legalistic approach. Our plan is to trust that you are walking in the Spirit unless you publicly demonstrate something other than the fruit of the Spirit in your words or deeds (Galatians 5:22-23). Thank you for partnering with us as we partner with our community in these difficult and confusing days. We are walking by faith, with prudence, for the thriving of our communities to the glory of God.

Please join us in prayer as we present to our congregation the FBC Five-Stage COVID-19 Response Plan. The bottom line is that we do not return to anything close to full functioning until FBC's Stage 5, so please understand that each stage is a small step towards that. This is a plan and it can be modified as we learn more. FBC's Stage 1 is what we have been doing for 2 months, FBC's Stages 2 & 3 will see very minor changes with our preference being that you continue to worship from home, FBC's Stage 4 is a transition and will have more significant changes as people start coming back to regular worship services and ministry opportunities in the building. Please read through this carefully and ask questions as you have them, after you've read through the whole plan.

Before we go into a lot of details, please know that we understand that the Governor stated Stage 2 would begin on May 4 and that churches can open on May 8. We made the decision to extend FBC's Stage 1 for one week to ensure all planning, communications, and preparations are of God and are done properly. With that said, nothing changes for this Sunday, May 10. FBC's Stage 2 will begin with Sunday, May 17. Thank you for trusting us to do this right and true, not rushing anything. We believe this is a good partnership decision as the Governor prefers for churches to continue asking people to watch online in these early transition days because how we respond today will determine how we can move forward in the coming days.

We will now look at some general guidelines provided by the state for places of worship.

The State Guidelines for Places of Worship: Quoted from the governor's guidance to churches:

https://www.backontrack.in.gov/files/BackOnTrack-IN_PlacesOfWorship.pdf

- Ask all individuals who are 65 and above or who have an underlying at-risk health condition to stay home and watch services online.
- Ensure 6 feet between individuals or family units of the same households during services
- Space and mark seating, alternating rows when possible
- Clean between each service and disinfect high-contact surfaces regularly
- Place hand sanitizers in high-contact locations (e.g. bathroom, entry, exit) and ask staff, members, and guests to sanitize their hands before entering the building
- Recommend putting on a face covering before entering the building
- Consider placing signage telling staff, members, and guests to not enter if they are symptomatic or if they have tested positive for COVID-19
- Implement non-contact greetings
- Avoid handing out materials
- Keep cafés, coffee, and other self-service stations closed
- Establish safe protocols for any communion and collection to avoid contact
- Dismiss services in a way that supports social distancing
- Place readily visible signage to remind everyone of best hygiene practices

The church will uphold these within a reasonable person's expectations and as they apply to our specific building and situation, appropriate signage will be in front of the entrance, and pertinent, up-to-date info will be posted on our webpage. Again, referencing 1 Peter 5:5-7, we ask all people to humbly submit to the posted signage and the specific guidelines within each of the five stages, regardless of your personal opinion. We are trying to protect a large congregation and the surrounding communities. Please do not limit other people's freedoms by exercising your freedom in a way that makes them feel unsafe in our church building.

First Baptist Church's Five-Stage Guidelines: A blended approach (general guidelines applied to our situation). For information on the governor's 5-stage plan, go to https://www.wthr.com/sites/default/files/2020/05/01/backontrack-in_overview-v7.pdf

FBC's Stage 1 (Red on Graphic) is behind us (March 15, 2020 to May 10, 2020*), but we must be able to return to this stage if circumstances deem it necessary in the future. This is how we have functioned over these last 2 months. It is possible, based on models from the Spanish Flu a century ago and some theoretical projection models for COVID-19, that a second "peak" could necessitate steps backward, up to and including stage 1. **The emphasis is on keeping everyone out of danger.** [**We understand that the Governor stated stage 2 would begin on May 4 and that churches can open on May 8. We made the decision to extend FBC's Stage 1 for one week to ensure all planning, communications, and preparations are of God and are done properly. Thank you for trusting us to do this right and true, not rushing anything. We believe this is a good partnership decision as the Governor prefers for churches to continue asking people to stay home in these early transition days because how we respond today will determine how we can move forward in the coming days.*]

- Building closed to all activities except for essential leadership & staff functioning and community partnership to bring thriving to our community. **Exceptions must be approved by the Elders.**
- Staff is asked to work remotely. **Any exceptions will be made by Office Director in partnership with Lead Pastor.**
- Online/virtual as the **only** means of participating in weekly programs.

FBC's Stage 2 (Orange on Graphic) starts on May 11, 2020** and extends tentatively to May 23, 2020. [***As stated above this does not apply to Sunday, May 10 since we extended FBC's Stage 1.*] **Only very minor changes to Stage 1 and the emphasis is still on keeping everyone out of danger.**

- Building closed to all activities except for essential leadership & staff functioning and community partnership to bring thriving to our community. **Exceptions must be approved by the Elders.**

- Staff is still asked to work remotely, but allowances can start being made as transition begins, and must follow all CDC protocols.. **Any exceptions will be made by Office Director in partnership with Lead Pastor.** No volunteers in office space in this stage.
- **Online/virtual as the only means of participating in all weekly programs with one allowance.***
- **THE ALLOWANCE:** The only allowance in FBC's Stage 2 will be regarding our primary Sunday morning 10:30 am service. Taking all general guidelines into account (see above), we will open the front doors under the portico and allow people to attend. **We actively request that people stay home or watch service as they have been, even though the front door is open.** **If you are unable to watch our service at home or safely at a friend's home, and if you meet the general guidelines for your own and others' safety, and if you feel that it is very important to your well-being that you attend the service live and in the building, then you can attend in person.** Please ensure that you meet all that criteria and we will respect the autonomous decision making authority of each individual. Please don't put your pastors in a hard situation, remembering 1 Peter 5:5-7. **In this stage, this will remain essentially an online service, but now with a live audience with the following requests and restraints:**
 - If you consider attending, please meet all recommended health requirements to do so. Please do not come if you are sick or have been exposed to a person who has been recently sick. According to the CDC, a person must be fever-free for 72 hours and be 10 days past the first appearance of symptoms to no longer be considered contagious.
 - Those who attend are **strongly advised** to wear a mask. **You will be lovingly asked to put one on when you arrive.** Our only exception is when someone is up front leading, singing, or communicating, but even those people will wear one during the other parts of the service. CDC states that singing produces the same projection of germs as coughing. Families with children who are age 2 and under should consider whether to attend or not since the CDC says it is not safe for children under the age of 2 to wear a mask.
 - All people are asked to use the hand sanitizing station upon walking in.
 - Those who attend will be asked and directed to sit every other pew with 6' between any non-household member. Please do not put someone in an awkward situation by sitting next to them, even if that is where you "always" sit. Be flexible and find a safe place to sit and respect people's boundaries. **Please don't put us in the awkward situation of having to ask you to move.**
 - Those who attend can drop their offering in a basket in the back. No passing of plate.
 - If a communion service arises during Stage 2 it is primarily focused on happening at home (as in Stage 1), but those who attend will be provided a self-contained communion packet upon entering (a table set up in back of worship center with them laid out).
 - There will be no bulletins provided in service. They will be sent via email and mailed to shut-ins.
 - There will be no neighborhood time and people are asked to respect one another's personal space regardless of how they personally feel about the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Indoor playground is closed and we ask people to respect one another's space.
 - No greeters at doors or in gathering area in this stage.
 - No volunteer at the "Start Here" or Children's Area sign in desk in this Stage.
 - **Doors open at 10 am, no Sunday School classes, no youth or children programs, no coffee or refreshments, no water fountain usage, no access to other areas, and no valet car services.**
 - The main and family bathrooms are available.
 - **The church doors will be closing 15 minutes following dismissal of the service.**

FBC's Stage 3 (Yellow on Graphic) is ahead of us, tentatively May 24, 2020 to June 13, 2020. **Only very minor changes to FBC's Stage 2 and the emphasis is still on keeping everyone safe as we take steps toward the next stage.**

- Building closed to all activities except for essential leadership & staff functioning and community partnership to bring thriving to our community. Additional exception is that use of building is now available by appointment only and for limited usage by FBC ministries, events, and activities. **Any leader or**

member who would like to do anything in the building must coordinate with the pastors before any planning or advertising of the event. CDC protocols are to be followed. No outside group usage unless approved by the staff and in continued partnership to bring thriving to our community in the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Staff can still work remotely, but are invited to come back to the office following all CDC protocols. Volunteers who work in office space to assist with day to day operations must be approved by the Office Director in conjunction with general guidelines.
- **Online services are still recommended as the preferred way to gather on Sunday morning.** In this stage, we ask the following requests and restraints, in conjunction with general guidelines:
 - If you consider attending, please meet all recommended health requirements to do so. Please do not come if you are sick or have been exposed to a person who has been recently sick. According to the CDC, a person must be fever-free for 72 hours and be 10 days past the first appearance of symptoms to no longer be considered contagious.
 - Those who attend are **strongly advised** to wear a mask. You will be directly asked to put one on when you arrive. Our only exception is when someone is up front leading, singing, or communicating, but even those people will wear one during other parts of the service. CDC states that singing produces the same projection of germs as coughing. Families with children who are age 2 and under should consider whether to attend or not since the CDC says it is not safe for children under the age of 2 to wear a mask.
 - All people are asked to use the hand sanitizing station upon walking in.
 - Those who attend will be asked and directed to sit every other pew with 6' between any non-household member. Please do not put someone in an awkward situation by sitting next to them, even if that is where you "always" sit. Be flexible and find a safe place to sit and respect people's boundaries. **Please don't put us in the awkward situation of having to ask you to move.**
 - Those who attend are invited to drop their offering in a basket in the back. No passing of plate.
 - If a communion service arises during Stage 3, those who attend will be provided a self-contained communion packet upon entering (a table set up in back of worship center with them laid out).
 - **Bulletins will be provided in service** and set on a table set up in the back of the worship center for people to pick up. Still no ushers to hand them out in this stage.
 - There will be no neighborhood time and people are asked to respect one another's personal space regardless of how they personally feel about the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Indoor playground is closed and we ask people to respect one another's space.
 - Friendly faces and greeters are invited in the Gathering Area again, but still no handshaking or hugs. Still no one at doors to allow people to have space to walk through.
 - **A volunteer at the "Start Here" and Children's Area sign in desk to answer questions.**
 - **Doors open at 10 am, no Sunday School classes, no youth or children programs, no coffee or refreshments, no water fountain usage, no access to other areas, and no valet car services.**
 - The main and family bathrooms are available.
 - **The church doors will be closing 15 minutes following dismissal of the service.**

FBC's Stage 4 (Blue on Graphic) is beyond that, tentatively June 14, 2020 to July 3, 2020. **In this stage, significant changes are made as we prepare to return to full operation.**

- The building is open to day to day operations to all FBC ministries, events, and activities. Outside group usage to be determined on a case by case basis by staff.
- Staff is invited to come back to the office, but allowances are made on a case by case basis. Volunteers who work in office space to assist with day to day operations still to be approved by the Office Director.
- **For the first time, everyone is encouraged to return to the church building to gather for worship in person.** We will continue to provide online services as they were before the pandemic, for those who have special situations or concerns. In this stage, we ask the following requests and restraints:

- Please meet all recommended health requirements to do so. According to the CDC, a person must be fever-free for 72 hours and be 10 days past the first appearance of symptoms to no longer be considered contagious.
- Wearing a personally provided mask is still a good choice, but the decision is up to each individual.
- All people are asked to use the hand sanitizing station upon walking in.
- Those who attend are requested to sit every other pew with 6' between any non-household member. Please do not put someone in an awkward situation by sitting next to them, even if that is where you "always" sit. Be flexible and find a safe place to sit and respect people's boundaries.
- Those who attend are invited to drop their offering in a basket in the back. No passing of plate.
- If a communion service arises during Stage 4, those who attend will be provided a self-contained communion packet upon entering (a table set up in back of worship center with them laid out).
- **Bulletins will be provided in service and handed out by ushers.**
- There will be no neighborhood time and people are asked to respect one another's personal space regardless of how they personally feel about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Indoor playground is closed and we ask people to respect one another's space.
- Friendly faces and greeters are invited in the Gathering Area again, but still no handshaking or hugs. Still no one at doors to allow people to have space to walk through.
- A volunteer at the "Start Here" and Children's Area sign in desk to answer questions.
- **Doors open at 10 am, no Sunday School classes, No youth or children programs, no coffee or refreshments, no water fountain usage, no access to other areas, and no valet car services.**

FBC's Stage 5 (Green on Graphic) tentatively starts on July 4, 2020. At this time, it is difficult to project this far into the future, but this stage is about taking significant steps to returning to all normal functioning with the following exceptions because of the significant amount of preplanning required for the following:

- The opening of in-person Children & Youth Ministry events, programs, and activities will be made available based on further discussion and partnership with public education partners. This includes everything that requires staff and/or volunteers to work directly with our beloved children.
- No major banquets or food gatherings, including pitch-ins, congregational meetings; specifically, the 110-year Anniversary Party events scheduled for the weekend of July 11-12, 2020 are postponed until a future date to be determined. If necessary, we will simply celebrate our 111-year Anniversary in 2021 so that we can make significant plans with a more reasonable certainty that they will happen.
- Online service continues to be provided.
- Additionally, there will be certain practices that remain, such as the hand-sanitizing stations through the building. At this stage, masks are no longer required, but are encouraged if you know you have recently been exposed to illness. Additionally, we will return to the policy we have always held that anyone who has had signs of an infectious illness should refrain from attending until they are well. Keep being safe and conscientious of your and everyone's health and well-being.

Finally, we have been and will continue to make every effort to have excellent custodial service, both with our own custodian, who is doing an amazing job, and when contracting a professional service when necessary. Please be a positive partner in keeping our building safe and sanitary. How you act, behave, and treat our church building will determine if other people feel safe and secure to join us now and in the future. Thank you!