

Our Church is reopening after COVID-19 shutdown - Online Service still the Norm

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"We have gloves, sanitizing equipment, temperature guns -- you name it," said Rev. Levy Daugherty, pastor of Atlanta Family Church. "Everyone has to wear a mask, even when we're singing. We have 'the shield' mask available, too."

It's a dramatic change to church services around the U.S. in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. While communities should aim to continue online service, Atlanta is among several Unificationist communities that reopened church service this month with safety measures in place. Only communities with permission from their FFWPU subregional directors are being allowed to open under the strictest guidelines.

"We aren't in full swing yet, but we're prepared," said Rev. Daugherty. Outdoor check-in now keeps tabs on who is entering the building, and chairs spaced away from each other ensures social distancing. "Families can sit together, but other people are sitting six feet apart," said Rev. Daugherty.

That hasn't stopped their lively spirit of worship though, with a recent sermon discussing the power of love and how to end racial discrimination. "We are talking about how to bring peace in our community and what we can do to stop racial prejudice in the U.S.," said Rev. Daugherty. "We've had young people in the community voice their concerns about the violence happening around the country, and we are working hard to solve those [problems here in Georgia](#)."

Notable guests have joined the in-person services, too. Rockdale County Sheriff's Deputy and pastor Dexter Kilgore, as well as a member of the Georgia House of Representatives, recently attended Atlanta Family Church where three young Unificationists gave a powerful presentation and program.

"I'm just so grateful that people want to create change, transforming themselves and society," said Rev. Daugherty. "A lot of our community members are over 60 years old, so it's important that the next generation is prepared to lead us forward. Many young people are inspired to take an active role in making this world a better place."

"We have routines now with cleaning and sanitizing," said Pastor Josue. "It's an adjustment and new learning experience, but we have to be very careful. Even though there are a lot of changes, people are happier and excited to be able to come to service."

Months of quarantine meant that many community members hadn't seen each other at all, a rough transition for some. "Most of our community members were asking to meet," said Pastor Josue. "I think, generally, humans are social beings and we thrive on that. We don't have a 'meet and greet' anymore, and there is no food at church, but for me, it's about recreating our connection with each other and being able

to see everyone."



In Michigan, doors reopened at Grand Rapids Family Church this month as well, where Pastor Josue Kisile warmly greeted his congregation. "I'm happy that everyone is healthy and I can see them all," he said. "We even do elbow bumps sometimes." Otherwise, community members sign in, maintain social distancing, and wear masks.

Unificationists at Seattle Family Church are also overjoyed to reconnect through in-person service this month. "It has been very refreshing and people are happy to see each other," said Pastor Nelson Mira. "It's been a relaxed, friendly atmosphere but we are taking all safety precautions."

Families sit at roundtables, hand sanitizer is easily accessible, and a breakout session after service follows social distancing guidelines. Pastor Nelson's wife even uses a temperature gun outside before admitting anyone into the building.

"It's a new beginning for us; starting church service with new positive possibilities," said Pastor Nelson. "Families who don't come in person can still tune in to the [National Family Service](#), or watch our local service recorded on Zoom. The only thing we are missing is coffee and meals."