

Southminster During the Pandemic

(March 2020 through early October 2021)

Southminster faced the constraints of the pandemic in some responsible, yet creative ways.

It began when our governor announced a quarantine in March of 2020. By that Sunday, we had a camera and started live-streaming services, asking congregation members to stay home. Now, we have a mixture of those choosing to be in the Sanctuary and those choosing to watch the live-stream. Here is a list of some of the things we have done thus far through the ups and downs of the pandemic

Early in the Pandemic:

- Began live-streaming services. For the first few months, only a soloist did the singing. Later, we had a masked vocal ensemble of 5 singers.
- We put puppets and large stuffed animals in the pews and showed pictures of them at the end of the service to make the children smile, but the adults enjoyed it, too. The stuffed animal, "Earl the Squirrel," was moved around the Sanctuary each week so children could try to spot him.
- Formed a "Safety Team" (doctor, nurse, microbiologist & others) to make protocol recommendations.
- Zoom Virtual Coffee Hour
- Bedtime stories read by the Associate Pastor & put on Facebook for our children.
- Adult Education Classes by Zoom
- Youth Group by Zoom: cooking, playing games, having discussions
- For Pentecost, people colored Pentecost flames & dropped them off at the church for us to include in the worship space.
- Children's garden at church. The children were asked what they wanted to have planted, & their parents could stop by the church so they could see what was growing. (Child-shaped markers with their names told them which plants were the ones they suggested.)
- The Annual "Blessing of the Backpacks" was done outside where people could either stay in or get out of their cars.
- We had a "drive-by" wedding shower for our Associate Pastor, & people decorated their cars.
- VBS was done virtually with breaks for children to do their crafts or projects. At the beginning of the week, they picked up kits with everything needed, & at the end of the week there was an outside celebration.
- Children & Youth had outdoor activities at the church & at parks throughout the summer.

Late 2020 to Early 2021

- We had a few mid-week services outside while the weather was still warm.
- Youth group met outside whenever possible, & with masks & distancing at other times.
- We invited our children & older members to become pen pals.
- Our "The Church Has Left the Building" Mission Service Day had to change, but we still managed to collect items for backpacks for the homeless, & people made items such as "Little Dresses for Africa" at home.
- Halloween: "Booing" with candy & sign delivered to the porch of one child's house & then that family delivering goodies to another.
- Advent/Christmas/Epiphany
 - Zoom Advent Devotional groups
 - Children's Advent activity kits delivered to their homes
 - People sent pictures of their Nativity sets, & we put them into a video that was shown at the beginning of the live-stream worship service.
 - Our youth did an outside video Nativity Pageant, moving throughout Dayton on the journey to "Bethlehem." It was shown during the Christmas Eve virtual service for families with children.
 - Advent Services by live-stream, including a children's service.
 - We had a skit about Simeon & Anna for the Sunday After Christmas.
 - We couldn't have our usual Epiphany Feast but had a special service.

➤ Lent/Easter

- Palms & Holy Week lessons & crafts delivered to children's homes.
- Zoom Lenten Devotional Groups
- An outdoor prayer labyrinth under our large pavilion shelter gave people a place to get out of their homes & move as they prayed.
- On the anniversary of the beginning of the quarantine, we had a special live-stream worship service of "Lament, Remembrance, & Hope." We had a video of pictures of those who had died in the past year. Each family contributed a couple of sentences about their loved ones. We lit candles & prayed. There were brief messages from the foot of the Cross, from behind the Communion Table, & at the Baptismal Font.
- Holy Week Stations of the Cross. This was set up indoors where people could sign up for separate times to come, masked, & walk through an interactive Stations of the Cross that related the events of Holy Week to current events.
- Children "buried their Alleluias" (with seed embedded in the paper) in potted plants, & they watched them come to life.
- On Easter, we had an outdoor coffee hour "Resurrection Celebration."
- On April 12th, 2021, we began to allow up to 25 people to sign up to come to in-person worship while everyone else live-streamed.

Mid- 2021

- On May 9th, we began in-person worship open to everyone and continued to live-stream.
- We had masked, liturgical dancers for Pentecost.
- In May, we began an additional, younger youth group for 4th & 5th graders, called, "Power 45." They have been meeting outside, under the Pavilion, & doing outside activities.
- We had a "Virtual Variety Night" on Zoom, led by the Youth Group as a fundraiser for them to go to the PC(USA) Montreat Youth Conference.
- VBS was in person (with safety precautions) in June and had 65 children learning about "God's Big World & Me."
- Blessing of the Backpacks Sunday had an outside celebration after worship with bounce houses, food, & games.
- We now have the full (masked) choir some Sundays & the Vocal Ensemble on other Sundays.

Late- 2021

- World Communion Sunday included the full choir, visiting Percussion Ensemble, & other instrumentalists. The anthems were from various countries around the world.
- "The Church Has Left the Building" day of service this year is coming up on October 10. Since we are still in a pandemic, we will have a combination of projects in the community as well as some with safety precautions outside at the church, & others that can be done at home.