

**COVID 19 Preparedness Plan**  
First Congregational Church of MN, UCC (First Church)  
6-2-21

First Church abides by state and local guidelines, ordinances, and directives related to the prevention of COVID-19 for all who use our building and grounds. This plan, with the following procedures, provides direction for those making decisions regarding health and safety practices in compliance with the Minnesota Department of Health in the prevention of COVID-19. Procedures reflect best practices based on science, community needs, and First Church's commitment to justice. Procedures will be evaluated, updated, and communicated on a regular basis to employees, congregants, building users and renters. These procedures and plans have been developed in dialogue with the Board and the staff, and are based on CDC and MDH guidelines (referenced at the end of this document).

The most up-to-date version of this plan is posted on our website, [www.firstchurchmn.org](http://www.firstchurchmn.org).

**Contacts**

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**Prevention**

Please do not come in to the church or participate in in-person church activities if you are sick, whether you believe your illness is COVID-related or not, and whether or not you are vaccinated. We require those participating in-person church events be able to answer "NO" to all the questions our health screening checklist (see Appendix B). This includes church activities that might take place away from the church building, such as small group meetings.

We strongly encourage those participating in church activities to be vaccinated if possible. Children under twelve and others who are unable to be vaccinated should continue to consider whether participating in in-person activities is an acceptable risk.

In general, we require for all activities in the building, and all church activities (wherever they are held) that at least 2 out of 3 precautions are in place: masking, physical distancing, or holding an activity outdoors.

We will make an exception to the above rule for small group gatherings of 12 or fewer people. If everyone in the group is vaccinated, then the group can meet indoors without wearing masks. Each member of the group will check in individually with the leader about their comfort level with not wearing masks. If anyone says they would prefer that the group wear masks, then we will ask the whole group to do so.

**Entering the Building**

At the 8<sup>th</sup> Ave entrance, the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, sign in sheet, masks, hand sanitizer, and supplies for wiping surfaces will be available.

Everyone who comes into the building will sign in and sign out using the sheet by the main door. If requested by the Minnesota Department of Health, the sign-in

information would be provided for contact tracing in the event that someone would become infected with COVID-19. Engaging in this practice is a crucial way we will keep the congregation safe and cooperate with public health efforts in the wider community.

The health questionnaire will be posted at the entrance to the building as a reminder to staff, congregants, guests, renters, service providers and others that signing in and entry to the building acknowledges that the entrant is not experiencing any of the symptoms on the checklist.

We require that everyone wear masks and observe distancing while moving through the common spaces of the building. We ask those entering the building to bring their own masks if they can. We will also have a supply of disposable masks on hand.

## **Worship**

Even as we return to the sanctuary, we will be providing a virtual worship option. We plan to create a hybrid online/ in person service format which will be a permanent addition to our worship. When we initially return to in person worship, the hybrid platform will not have been fully developed so both virtual and in person members should be aware that there may be initial rough spots.

We will resume in- person worship with a capacity limit of 80, to allow for physical distancing. We will maintain 6 feet between “worship pods” (either members of the same household, or individuals who mutually agree to form a pod to worship with each other). In order to ensure that we do not exceed our capacity we may ask worshippers to pre-register.

Those participating in in-person worship will be asked to review and follow the worship covenant and answer “no” to all questions on the health questionnaire (see appendices A and B for these documents)

Because indoor worship is a large group gathering that includes both vaccinated and unvaccinated people, we will continue to wear face masks that match CDC guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>)

Worship leaders may remove their masks while they are speaking. They should put them back on when they are finished speaking.

We will not have singing by the full choir or the whole congregation. A soloist or a small group of singers, spaced at least 12’ from each other and from the congregation, may sing. Singers will wear masks made for singing. The congregation will be able to hum.

Multi-stall bathrooms should be used by one worship pod at a time.

In general, we will ask worshippers not to arrive before 9:30, unless they are participating in the worship rehearsal at 9. We ask everyone to exit the building as soon as worship is over. We will not pass microphones, offering plates or communion elements. We will adjust these activities so that they happen without contact.

We will not be having coffee hour inside following the service. Weather permitting, we can gather outside. We will provide limited outdoor seating for those with accessibility concerns. For the sake of both simplicity and safety, we will likely not be serving food or drink outside.

### **Scheduling**

At this time, it's especially important that the church is aware of all events that are related to First Church, both those gathering offsite and those meeting at church. This helps us ensure that all our activities are being held in a safe manner.

Please schedule all events through Sarah. And check in with Jane to discuss procedures for in-person gatherings.

We strive to be stewards of the space, clean thoroughly, be hospitable and follow prevention practices. Scheduling makes this possible.

When gathering offsite as part of an organized church activity, this COVID-19 Preparedness Plan must still be followed. Prior to the event, remind participants to review the health questionnaire and refrain from attending in-person events if they are experiencing any of the symptoms listed. All groups that meet offsite should keep a record of participants (online or on paper) that could be made available if needed for contact tracing purposes.

### **Pastoral visits**

Jane is vaccinated and can visit those who are vaccinated in their homes, at the church, or in other indoor spaces. She will also continue to make virtual visits or outdoor visits and wear masks and maintain distance with those who aren't vaccinated, or who request such precautions.

### **Weddings and Memorial Services**

Jane will perform in-person weddings and memorial services in the sanctuary observing the same procedures the church has for other worship services.

### **Food and Drink**

Small groups of 12 or less who are vaccinated and who have agreed not to wear masks may also share food as part of their gathering.

For larger gatherings or gatherings that include unvaccinated people, food should not be served inside. Food may be served outdoors as long as distancing can be maintained while people are eating.

### **Cleaning**

Sanitizing supplies will be available in the office, Pilgrim Hall, sanctuary, bathrooms and basement play area.

Brad will also be cleaning and sanitizing all areas, following MDH guidelines <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefaitth.pdf> (pp 7-8)

## **Staff**

We want to support our staff in having choices about the risk level they can accept in the course of church activities and the use of the building.

Staff will wear masks when in common areas of the building. If they are working in a private space alone, they may take off their masks.

## **Building Use**

In-person use of the building by outside groups is now allowed. Groups should follow the guidelines that are outlined in this COVID preparedness plan.

## **When someone become infected**

If someone who has been in the church building or has attended an off-site, in-person church meeting becomes ill with COVID-19, they should notify Jane. The church community and other building users will be notified without revealing the name of the person who is sick. Individuals who used the building during the same period as the infected person, or were present at the same in-person meeting, and who may have been exposed, should contact their health care practitioner immediately and follow their guidance in regard to self-isolating, testing, and other steps. In addition, the church will also contact local public health authorities and immediately discontinue all in-person activities until a later date when public health officials deem it safe again.

## **Resources**

- Minnesota Department of Health - Home Page website:  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/index.html>
- Minnesota Department of Health website pages related to COVID-19. Click on Community and Faith-based organizations:  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html>
- Minnesota Department of Health: Guidance for Safe Celebrations and Events (July 31, 2020) <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf>
- Minnesota Department of Health, Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening, Faith-Based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals guidance for safely reopening (August 13, 2020) <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefait.pdf>
- Minnesota Department of Health, Guidance for Caring for People in their Homes (July 22, 2020) <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf>
- Minnesota Department of Health, Guidance for Gatherings, Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, and Ceremonies (July 28, 2020)  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidefaith.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Considerations for Community-Based Organizations and Faith-based Organizations <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Gatherings and Community Events  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html>
- City of Minneapolis - Coronavirus updates  
<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/coronavirus/index.htm>
- The advice of our Conference Minister, Rev. Shari Prestemon  
<https://files.constantcontact.com/73d71b6a001/a13cba0f-5326-4151-944a-fcdc0869c5ef.pdf>
- A presentation by Dr. Michael Osterholm to pastors:  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/6Z0ucrr-z43TtDG4QSDA\\_EqW466f6is2yVL-vALmky9U3BQO1DwY7pDYetnC86r\\_1FTMzLcRO-xQs63?continueMode=true](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/6Z0ucrr-z43TtDG4QSDA_EqW466f6is2yVL-vALmky9U3BQO1DwY7pDYetnC86r_1FTMzLcRO-xQs63?continueMode=true)

## **APPENDIX A**

### Covenant for in-person worship at First Congregational Church of Minnesota, UCC

During this pandemic, each and every one of us have made tremendous sacrifices to keep ourselves, our families, and our community safe. As we enter a new phase of the pandemic, we are planning for the First Church community worshipping in person again. However, we know that vaccines are not an immediate fix. It will take time for us to return to a familiar style of worship, and in the meantime, even in-person worship will not be the same as it was before. As part of our ongoing commitment to caring for each other and prioritizing the health and wellbeing of our community, we as a church hereby commit to a covenant, with each other and the community as a whole, to the following commitments for in-person worship.

- 1) We pledge to abide by all First Church COVID guidelines, including not attending in-person church services if we are ill or feel unwell.
- 2) We pledge to wear masks (covering mouth and nose) at all times inside the church building when others are present.
- 3) We pledge to maintain six feet of distance from people outside our household, or our “bubble.” A bubble is a group of individuals with whom we have mutually agreed that we feel safe when in closer proximity with each other (i.e., less than six feet.).
- 4) We understand that congregational singing will not be permitted at this time. Humming will be permitted. This specific covenant may be modified as additional guidance is provided to us.
- 5) We agree that any coffee hours will be held outside, weather permitting. After the service ends, we agree to promptly move outside for the safety of all.

### References

- [Covenant Presbyterian Church](#)

## APPENDIX B

### FCC health screening checklist for in-person worship

- 1) Have you or anyone in your household experienced any of the following COVID-19 symptoms in the past two weeks? (aside from symptoms associated with chronic conditions or seasonal allergies):
  - Fever or chills
  - New cough (started within the last 14 days)
  - New shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (started within the last 14 days)
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Sore throat
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headache
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  
- 2) In the last 14 days, have you recently had close contact\* with someone who has COVID-19 or who has symptoms of COVID-19 as described above? (\*Close contact is defined as spending a total of 15 minutes or more, over a 24-hour period, within six feet of someone outside your household).
  
- 3) Have you tested positive for COVID-19 in the past two weeks, or are you waiting on pending results from a COVID-19 diagnostic test?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, please stay home, for the safety of others in our congregation. Our worship service will continue to be accessible remotely for those who want or need to participate from home. The link to our livestream can be found here.