

COVID 19 Preparedness Plan

First Congregational Church of MN, UCC (First Church)

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 First Church Board and staff, and are based on CDC and MDH guidelines (referenced at the end of this document).

Contacts

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Prevention

- Please do not come into the church or participate in in-person church activities if you are sick—whether you believe your illness is COVID-related or not. This includes church activities that might take place away from the church building, such as small group meetings.
- We strongly encourage those in high-risk categories, given age or underlying conditions, not to come inside the church building (even if they are otherwise healthy and fit). Those wishing to come to church should also consider who is in their household, and whether they fall into a high-risk category. Any risk of exposure that one person takes on is a risk that the whole household is also taking on.
- We require that everyone wear masks while in the building (with the exception of staff when they are working privately in their offices). 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.

Church life

- We will continue to hold worship services virtually for the foreseeable future.
- We strongly encourage everyone to hold church meetings and gatherings online. If there is a compelling reason to meet in person, opt for meeting outside as the weather allows. If an indoor, in-person meeting is necessary, it's best for the meeting to take place at the church rather than in a private home. Since the church is a large building, it is easier to adequately maintain social distancing than in a private home.

Entering the building

- At the 8th Ave. SE 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. In the event that someone who has been inside the building becomes infected with COVID-19, the church will provide, if requested by the Minnesota Department of Health, sign-in information for contact tracing. Engaging in this practice is crucial to keeping the congregation safe and cooperating with public health efforts in the wider community.
- A list of COVID-19 symptoms 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 identified on the checklist.
- Anyone in the building will wear a mask continuously during their time there, will maintain 6-foot physical distancing when possible, and will wash hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol).

Scheduling

- At this time, it is especially important that the church office is aware of all events that are related to First Church, both offsite and in or around the church building. This will help 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 (which should only be held if virtual gatherings are not an option). Jane can help you determine whether an in-person meeting is necessary and how to ensure it is held safely.
- We strive to be good stewards of the space by cleaning thoroughly, showing hospitality, and following 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 any event, please remind participants to review the COVID-19 symptom checklist, and to refrain from attending in-person events if they are experiencing any of these symptoms: fever, chills, a new cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, new muscle aches, new headaches, new loss of smell or taste. Provide this policy to the group. All groups that meet offsite should keep a record of participants (online or on paper) that can be made available if needed for contact tracing purposes.

Specific meeting guidelines

- Outdoor meetings: place chairs at least 6 feet apart (and do not switch chairs). Bring your own chair, when possible. Wearing masks is required if 6-foot physical distancing is not maintained.
- Indoor meetings: Wear masks AND observe a 6-foot distance between people.
- Refrain from serving food as part of gatherings. Individuals may bring their own snacks or drinks. However, given that individuals must remove their masks to eat, a minimum 6-foot distance between individuals must be maintained while consuming food or drinks.
- Capacity of spaces in our facility: group gatherings must adhere to the following limitations (and must abide by any other limits set by public health officials):
 Pilgrim Hall: 12 people
 Parlor: 6 people
 Basement play room: 12 people
 Sanctuary: 20 people
 Restrooms: The number of people in a multi-stall restroom is limited to one person at a time, with a waiting line (6 feet apart) outside the door.
- The main kitchen, upstairs classrooms, and offices are closed to general use:

Pastoral visits

- Jane will make outdoor visits to peoples' homes wearing masks and maintaining distance (weather permitting). She will make in-person visits in the hospital when it is allowed by the hospital. She will visit those who are dying (at home, or in a nursing facility or hospital) whenever it is possible. Otherwise her interactions with people will be virtual.

Weddings and memorial services

- Jane will perform in-person graveside services or brief services at the columbarium, with 10 people or fewer, wearing masks and maintaining distance.
- Jane will perform brief wedding ceremonies with the couple and witnesses (10 people or fewer), wearing masks and maintaining distance. Preferably these ceremonies will happen outdoors.
- Jane is happy to find ways to record or livestream weddings or graveside/columbarium services. She is also prepared to lead virtual memorial services that can include the whole community using Zoom.

Food and drink

- No food or drink will be served in a group manner inside or outside the building.

- The church kitchen will not be used except by staff and volunteers from the community kitchen.
- Members who are working at the church are asked to bring their own food, water bottles, and utensils.

Cleaning

- Sanitizing supplies will be available in the office, Pilgrim Hall, sanctuary, bathrooms and basement play room.
- 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 continue to encourage staff to work from home as much as possible.
- We support our staff in their choices about the risk level they can accept in the course of church activities and in their use of the building.
- Our staff members' usual work hours in the building are: Brad Schumann, 10 am–2 pm daily except Wednesdays and Sundays; Jane McBride Mondays and Thursdays 9a–3p and Wednesdays 11:30a–3:30p (otherwise working at home). Sarah Tittle is working at home, with brief daily visits to the church to do essential tasks. Byron Almén is working at home.
- Staff will wear masks when in common areas of the building or near other people. If they are working in a private space alone, they may take off their masks.
- Jane will work in the office off Pilgrim Hall when she and Sarah are in the building together for an extended period of time.
- We ask members of the congregation not enter the office space unless absolutely necessary, and to let Sarah know before they do.

Marcy Holmes Neighborhood Association

- MHNA staff members will use their office at alternate times.
- MHNA staff may bring their children to play in the basement while they work, with the expectation they will clean the bathroom and toys after use.
- We are not allowing in-person community/neighborhood meetings at this time.

Music lessons

- Instruments will be sanitized between uses.
- Singing or playing of wind or bass instruments as part of lessons is not permitted.
- Everyone will wear masks at all times and maintain social distancing of 6 feet or more.

Other building users

The use of the building by outside organizations is limited at this time. Those currently using the building include the Community Kitchen and the Distance Learning pod. These groups will also abide by our COVID-19 preparedness plan. We will continue to assess what other uses of the building are possible, with careful planning and coordination.

When someone becomes 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 guidance about 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 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