

COVID 19 Preparedness Plan
First Congregational Church of MN, UCC (First Church)
Revised 11/3/21

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.

Contacts

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Prevention

Please do not enter 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 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 8th 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

will be provided for contact tracing in the event that someone becomes infected with COVID-19. Engaging in this practice is crucial to keeping the congregation safe and to cooperating 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

We provide a hybrid online/in-person service format which is a permanent addition to our worship. The hybrid platform is complex so both virtual and in-person members should be aware that there may be occasional rough spots.

In-person worship has 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 are 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 do not have singing by the full choir or the whole congregation. A soloist or a small group of singers, spaced from each other and from the congregation, may sing. Singers wear masks made for singing. The congregation is able to hum.

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

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

After the service, weather permitting, we can gather outside. We provide limited outdoor seating for those with accessibility concerns. When weather does not permit gathering outside after worship, members may gather in Pilgrim Hall. While indoors,

members must wear masks and maintain social distancing. Currently, beverages and snacks are not provided.

Pilgrim Hall

Church-related gatherings. Our general rule is that food and drink are not served during large gatherings indoors. However, we will make occasional exceptions for events that are important for the care of our members. Members must be aware that these gatherings pose a higher risk, even though we take precautions to help ensure their health. These exceptional events should be planned and discussed with the Principal Minister to ensure event-specific safety measures are in place.

Receptions (e.g., following memorial services and weddings). Attendees must wear masks and maintain social distancing. Beverage and snacks may be provided. Attendees should wear masks when not eating or drinking. Sitting at tables with chairs arranged for distancing is encouraged. We will follow CDC guidelines for food service and restaurants, especially those using strategies for serving food that involve less contact.

Other events held primarily for the First Church community may be conducted if approved by the Principal Minister, who must consider possible impacts on church staff. Attendees should wear masks when not eating or drinking. Sitting at tables with chairs arranged for distancing is encouraged. We will follow CDC guidelines for food service and restaurants, especially those using strategies for serving food that involve less contact.

Non-church gatherings (e.g., polling site, community meetings) may be held if approved by the Principal Minister, after consulting with staff. Compliance with CDC guidelines is the responsibility of the host or organizer.

Scheduling

At this time, it is 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 Tittle, and check in with Jane McBride to discuss procedures for in-person gatherings. We strive to be stewards of the space, to clean it thoroughly, and to 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 or outdoor visits, wear a

mask, 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

During meetings related to church-related activities involving small groups of 12 or fewer who are vaccinated and who have agreed not to wear masks, food may be shared as part of the gathering. This policy also applies to meetings of members away from First Church. This policy does not apply to social gatherings of members away from First Church.

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 McBride. 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 who 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

APPENDIX A

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

During this pandemic, each and every one of us has 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 community time after church will be held outside if weather permits. On Sundays when we gather inside, we will continue to mask and distance and food and drink will not be served.

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 6 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.