

## **Introduction**

At the June meeting, the Ad Council tasked the Trustees with developing a plan for re-opening the church building for in-person activities, including worship, following our extended building closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As I'm sure you're aware, we won't be able to return to church life as usual. We will need to take preventative measures against the spread of the virus in our gatherings.

We have considered the viral transmission vectors in developing the following plan for re-opening. One way that the virus spreads seems to be via aerosols (small droplets that are expelled by breathing and linger in the air for extended periods of time, which are breathed in by other persons). This is a particular problem indoors because the aerosols don't have a means to dissipate. The concentration of infected aerosols builds up over time as long as people are present and is increased when more people are present. Another way that the virus spreads is by surface transmission (the touching of items on which viral droplets have settled, followed by touching of the face).

This plan was approved by the Ad Council on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

## **Attendance limits, social distancing, screening, and masks**

Keeping people at a distance and limiting the number of people inside a room are measures given by both the State of Minnesota and the Minnesota Annual Conference for re-opening churches.

### *Capacity*

A hard cap of 60 persons for worship services held in our sanctuary is mandated. This cap includes the balcony. This number limits seating to four people on every other pew. Obviously, the pew seating limit will need to be flexible to accommodate households that are larger than four people. We will ask people to call ahead to reserve a spot for worship.

Our normal September – May attendance in Sunday worship ranges from 60 – 90 persons. If we plan to offer in-person worship for that many people, we may need to offer multiple services. Wednesday evening is proposed for an additional service. Another possibility would be to maintain a single weekly service and

allow people to attend every other Sunday. A survey will be sent to people to inquire a) if they would attend an in-person worship service and b) whether they would be willing to worship at a Wednesday evening service or on alternate Sundays. If there is no demand for a second service, then it doesn't need to be offered.

### *Distancing*

We will need measures to keep people apart before, during, and after the worship service.

*Controlled access* will be helpful for distancing before and after the service. The 23<sup>rd</sup> St entrance will be closed for worship services. Worshippers will be allowed entrance through the front door on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave E and the back-lot entrances (the lift and the back door).

*Greeters* will be stationed at the top of the stairs at the front entrance and next to room 108 to cover the back entrances. The role of the greeters will be different from normal. In addition to briefly greeting people, they will also be offering masks to those who don't have one, informing people about the protocols, and gently keeping them moving towards the sanctuary. The greeters should avoid bunching people up, but should make sure that no more than one household is in the entryway at any time.

*Seating* in the sanctuary should also be controlled. Bulletins will be placed in the pew backs or on the cushions to mark where people should sit. We will encourage individual households to sit separately, but we also need to remember that we have quite a few single-person households that can be permitted to sit together if they feel comfortable doing so. All will be asked to stay in their seats at all times.

### *During worship*

The worship service will need to be changed to maintain social distancing. There won't be a time of greeting or passing of the peace, and the offering plate won't be passed around. Instead, the plates will be located at the sanctuary doorways, and people can drop their offering in the plates as they enter or exit. A children's message would be given, but the children would remain in their pews rather than come forward.

*Singing* increases the distance that aerosols spread because air is expelled more forcefully. Therefore, congregational singing won't be included in the service.

*Communion* can be offered during worship, but the elements of bread and cup need to be distributed differently. We will switch from bread to individual wafers and from a shared chalice to individual (disposable) cups of juice. People would come forward by pew to receive the elements and take them back to their pews.

*Exiting the service* should be done by rows, beginning with the rear pews. Designated ushers can serve to direct the pews. *Coffee fellowship* following the service should be eliminated because of the risk of contamination and transmission by food service as well as the difficulty of keeping people distanced in the fellowship hall.

*Symptom screening* of worshippers will be done at the building entrances. Signs will be posted at the entrances with an updated list of COVID-19 symptoms and a request for anyone who has experienced these symptoms in the past 14 days to return home. Greeters will ask attendees if they have experienced any of the symptoms in the past 14 days.

### *Masks*

The wearing of masks will be strongly encouraged. Masks will be made available to those who didn't bring one. Individuals should not be forced to leave if they refuse to wear a mask or are unable to wear a mask. However, the worship service should be cancelled if less than 80% of those in attendance are wearing masks.

### **Cleaning and sanitizing**

High-use areas should be sanitized after each gathering. These areas include the sanctuary, the bathrooms, the lift, and the entryways. A fogger is a quick and efficient way to sanitize large areas, and will be effective on both aerosols and contaminated surfaces. The church will purchase one and use it in the high-use areas following each service.

### *Hand-sanitizing stations*

Hand-sanitizer dispenser pumps will be purchased for each entrance to limit surface transmission. One should be placed at each entrance to the building. We

should also consider creating hand-sanitizing stations for the Sunday school hallway and the fellowship hall (at the time that will be used again).

### *Custodian*

A custodian should be contracted to clean and sanitize the church. The Trustees have recommended that Karen Howard be hired as an independent custodial contractor.

## **Other considerations**

### *Children's ministry*

It is possible to hold Sunday school if the number of people in the room is limited. Our current group is small enough to gather together in our classrooms. If the Education Committee decides to offer Sunday school, we need to make sure to include the Sunday school wing in our sanitation protocols.

It is unlikely that Wesley Wednesdays will be offered in the fall. However, there has been some discussion of offering space in our building for school use if they need more space for social distancing. If so, we would need to do further planning on how to accommodate them.

### *Small groups and non-worship activities*

Small-group gatherings will preferably be limited to 10 or fewer persons. Exceptions for groups of up to 20 persons, such as for the First Family Fun Night, will be made by request.

### *Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Garden Club*

The scouting organizations and the Garden Club that use the church will be asked to submit their plans for building usage to Pastor Andy. These plans will be reviewed by the Trustees.

### *Funerals and Weddings*

Any funerals or weddings planned for the building should follow the above protocols.

### *Online presence*

There will continue to be a number of people who won't feel safe to gather for in-person worship. It will be vital to continue offering worship services on Facebook (as well as our HPAT broadcast). Accommodations will need to be made for filming the service during in-person worship.