

First United Church COVID-19 Plan Relaunching Guidelines: In Person Ministry Executive Summary

Looking Forward in Faith

In Newfoundland and Labrador, our churches are permitted to resume operations with MANY restrictions at Alert Level 2, including “no more than 100 people, or 50 per cent capacity, whichever is less”.

Faith-based services pose a risk of COVID-19 transmission through:

- Gatherings
- Sharing of ceremonial objects
- communion
- singing.

Individuals over 60 and those with chronic conditions are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Our community of faith is required to make a plan that fits with our needs, taking into consideration the activities undertaken and the demographic of our church community.

First United Church will be moving to re-entry to the Sanctuary for the congregation very slowly. The restrictions that are currently in place require a number of actions for us to take that will detract enormously from the church experience. For example:

- Capacity restricted to 58 maximum in total based on our space available – who do we say no to?
- All congregants will have to register by calling the church between 10am and 1pm on Tuesday, Thursday or Friday each week to reserve their place. Do not leave a voicemail to reserve your place.
- Congregants wishing to use the assisted listening devices must bring their own headsets
- Coat racks will not be available for use
- Maintain physical distancing in the vestibule and in the sanctuary (pews will be closed off ensuring physical separation between all family units).
- No gatherings before church; congregants will be seated by an usher upon arrival and registration
- No gatherings following service. Congregants will be directed out of the building immediately on the conclusion of the service, by row, by an usher.
- Ushers will seat congregants starting at the front of the sanctuary and dismiss congregants starting at the rear of the sanctuary
- Singing will not be permitted
- No choir
- No passing of the peace or shaking hands
- Congregants will be required to wear masks.
- Bulletins will not be used
- No hymn books or bibles in the pews
- No Sunday School

- Members of the Congregation in vulnerable categories (> 60 years old or with underlying medical conditions) are advised not to attend.
- Continuously advise any congregants who are symptomatic or have been advised by public health 8-1-1 to report their symptoms, to self-isolate and stay at home (Fever above 38C, a new cough, or worsening cough, headache, sore throat, runny nose, fatigue, muscle pain, diarrhea, loss of sense of taste, loss of smell, and in children, purple markings on the fingers and toes)
- Church sanctuary, vestibule and washrooms will be completely cleaned after each service
- Persons who have arrived in the province less than 14 days prior must be self isolating and are not permitted to attend
- Only church members will be permitted to attend. No visitors will be admitted

The current on-line service is well attended and appreciated and will continue.

Gatherings:

- **Funerals** will be held at the church under exceptional circumstances only.
- **Weddings** will be held at the church with strict adherence to public health directives.
- **Infant baptisms** will be held at the church with strict adherence to public health directives.
- Cleaning and disinfecting will need to be completed after every gathering.

Visitation and Pastoral Care:

- Visitation and Pastoral care will be through phone or other virtual methods.
- Hospital visits can be arranged with the hospital Chaplin.

Members of the congregation are encouraged to use the secure mail slot to the right of the main entrance to drop off their givings and/or prayer requests or to use online methods for donations or other contacts. Email, phone messages and the mail slot are checked regularly.

September 8, 2020

First United Church

COVID-19 Plan

Relaunching Guidelines: In Person Ministry

(Adapted from Guidelines provided by First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council and the
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador)

August 19, 2020

Our Mission

We are a welcoming, spirit-filled community of Christians spreading God's love through worship, caring, sharing and outreach.

Prayer for Our Church

Loving God, we bring before you our hopes and dreams for First United Church. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way worship has taken place, changed the way people interact with people, changed the way we do ministry. As we consider a return to worship in our sanctuary, let us not ignore what we have learned. We pray, O God, for those most vulnerable, those who will not be able to worship in person until a vaccine is found. Be with us as we open ourselves to new and exciting ways to worship using physical distancing and technology and other methods not yet discovered. May your Spirit guide us along your path as we daily discern your will for our lives and the life of First United. We are your servants, O God. Help us to grow where you have planted us. Amen.

The thought of returning to in-person worship in our churches is both exciting and scary. We are all doing our best to navigate these uncharted waters with guidance from our health and government officials. As we begin to plan for our return to our Church building, we know that it cannot be church as usual, but must be church in the new normal.

Looking Forward in Faith

In Newfoundland and Labrador, our churches are permitted to resume operations with MANY restrictions at Alert Level 2.

The restrictions from our health care authorities are as follow:

- places of worship may host services and faith-based activities of no more than 100 people, or 50 per cent capacity, whichever is less. This limit includes officiants, staff and volunteers.
- places of worship are encouraged to continue hosting services and faith-based activities online or through drive-in services. Social gatherings that normally occur before and after a service (e.g. communal dinners and lunches) should be avoided at this time.
- to support public health contact tracing efforts if necessary, record the name and contact information of those attending faith-based activities. Faith-based organizations will have full ownership of their attendance lists, and will only be asked to share attendance lists with Public Health if a potential exposure occurs. Lists can be discarded after 14 days.
- Promote physical distancing; physical distancing of 2 meters (6 feet) must be maintained between congregants. People from the same bubble can sit together without physical distancing.
- Arrange or mark seating to ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not in the same bubble.
- Registration of participants is encouraged to effectively manage the number of individuals attending, and can assist faith-based organizations in keeping a record of attendance for contact tracing efforts. Avoid registration processes where attendees have to use common-

use items such as pens and pencils. Instead, have attendees use their own writing utensils, or have a staff member or volunteer record names. Registration through phone or online processes is encouraged.

- Use visual cues to support physical distancing, such as floor markings and posters. Verbal reminders of physical distancing are also recommended.
- Implement one-way traffic flow
- Control and stagger entry into, and exit from, the place of worship before and after services (e.g. by dismissing individuals by section, rather than all at once).
- Identify areas, such as lobbies, where crowding and bottlenecks are common, and use volunteers, staff, or barriers to redirect people who may gather in these areas.
- If multiple gatherings are held on a single day, the start and end times must allow for attendees who are exiting one gathering to avoid contact with those arriving for the next gathering. There must also be sufficient time for cleaning and disinfection between gatherings.
- Enhanced Sanitation; Provide Health Canada approved hand sanitizer (these typically contain at least 60 per cent alcohol) near the entrances and exits and throughout the place of worship in high traffic areas. Signage should be posted asking congregants to use sanitizer.
- Increase cleaning and disinfection of commonly contacted areas, including:
 - Seating;
 - Doorknobs;
 - Railings;
 - Light switches;
 - Elevator buttons
 - Ceremonial objects.
- Washrooms should be open, but increased cleaning and disinfection must take place. Ensure washrooms are always supplied with liquid soap and paper towels, and that warm running water is available. Contactless garbage bins should be available and emptied frequently.
- Higher Risk Activities
 - Handshaking, hugging, touching or passing objects between people, or other forms of physical contact are not permitted.
 - Passing collection plates is not permitted. Alternatives can be considered, such as online donations or a depository to accept offerings.
 - Faith-based rituals requiring physical contact between people should be changed to maintain physical distancing; if this is not possible, increase hand hygiene and wear a non-medical mask.
 - Common use items should not be used, such as books and hymnals. Projecting materials or distribution of single-use materials can be considered, and congregants are encouraged to bring their own items. Discard of printed materials after the service is complete.
 - If touching of ceremonial objects is required, individuals should perform hand hygiene before and after touching the object. They should not kiss, embrace, or press their faces on any shared ceremonial objects.
 - Microphones must not be shared. Limit the number of people providing readings or other activities that need a microphone.
 - If sharing communion is part of a faith-based ritual, the following precautions must be taken:
 - Serve in pre-packaged or individual portions.
 - Have a small number of designated servers.
 - Servers and recipients must not have physical contact.

- Servers should wear a non-medical mask, and wash or sanitize their hands immediately before and after serving. Recipients are also recommended to wash or sanitize their hands before and after consuming.
- Singing and playing wind/brass instruments is not recommended, due to increased risk of spread of virus with these activities. If such activities must occur they should be performed by as few people as possible who are positioned at least 12 feet from each other and other staff or volunteers. There must be no sharing of instruments or microphones.
- Choirs are not permitted.
- Congregational singing is discouraged. Participants can hum, where appropriate.
- Offering of infant and child minding, Children's Liturgy or Sunday School is not permitted at this time. Children should stay with their families for the duration of the service.
- Personal Practices;
 - You should complete the COVID-19 self-assessment before visiting a place of worship
 - You should stay home if you are sick.
 - If you are over 60 or have an underlying medical condition, you should consider delaying your return to your place of worship. Continue to participate in services online, if possible.
 - If you have arrived in Newfoundland and Labrador from outside the province within the last 14 days, you need to self-isolate and are not permitted to visit the place of worship.
 - Wash or sanitize your hands often.
 - Practice cough and sneeze etiquette, and avoid touching your face.
 - You can wear a non-medical mask, but this is not required if you maintain physical distancing from others who are not in your bubble.

Know the Risks

Faith-based services pose a risk of COVID-19 transmission through:

- Gatherings
- Sharing of ceremonial objects
- communion
- singing.

Individuals over 60 and those with chronic conditions are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19

Our community of faith is required to make a plan that fits with our needs, taking into consideration the activities undertaken and the demographic of our church community. Region has offered the following to help us develop a unique plan for our community of faith. Consequently, our plan will be different from other churches and may need to change depending on the directions from our health care authorities and others.

Faithful Discernment and Suggestion of a Plan

The safety of staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve, needs to be at the center of our decision making. First, however, we are asked to consider the following questions to about the faith, principles and values that underlay our decision:

- What is the need we are trying to respond to, if we return to the Sanctuary?
- Does our decision to meet in person serve that need in a way that is faithful? Is a fear of losing members, money or conflict factoring into decision-making?
- Does the risk of illness outweigh the benefit of gathering?

- What is the impact of our decision on vulnerable members? (gathering in a way that leaves our vulnerable members out might be just as harmful as not gathering)
- What will we not be able to have for some time: gatherings with food, coffee hour, potlucks?
- What shall we do differently, and how shall we live differently as we work through the pandemic and emerge in this new season?
- Where are the signs of hope?
- What will we learn from our experience that we can take forward?

It is through the discussion on each of these that will dictate the pace that we will move back to “normal”. Notwithstanding the above at this point in time it is recommended that First United undertake the following activities as each Alert Level is reached:

Alert Level 2 - Government of Newfoundland Labrador Guidelines for Churches, June 22:

- Places of worship are permitted to resume operations with many restrictions as noted above including a “no more than 100 people, or 50 per cent capacity, whichever is less”.

First United Church Guidelines:

1. Church Services:

First United Church will be moving to the re-entry to the Sanctuary for the congregation very slowly. The restrictions that are currently in place would require a number of actions for us to take that will detract enormously from the church experience. For example:

- Capacity restricted to 58 maximum in total based on our space available – who do we say no to?
- All congregants will have to register by calling the church between 10am and 1pm on Tuesday, Thursday or Friday each week to reserve their place. Do not leave a voicemail to reserve a place.
- Congregants wishing to use the assisted listening devices must bring their own headsets
- Coat racks will not be available for use
- Maintain physical distancing in the vestibule and in the sanctuary (pews will be closed off ensuring physical separation between all family units).
- No gatherings before church; congregants will be seated by an usher upon arrival and registration
- No gatherings following service. Congregants will be directed out of the building immediately on the conclusion of the service, by row, by an usher.
- Singing will not be permitted (*Communal singing poses serious risks! Scientific evidence shows that the forceful breathing action of singing disperses the plume of aerosolized droplets from a singer’s mouth much further than six feet. Public health officials have said that masks can’t completely contain such forcefully expelled mist. Tests have proven that microscopic ‘droplet nuclei’ that can contain the virus remain suspended in the air for up to 3 hours*)
- No choir
- No passing of the peace or shaking hands
- Congregants will be required to wear masks.
- Bulletins will not be used
- No hymn books or bibles in the pews
- Ushers will seat congregants starting at the front of the sanctuary and dismiss congregants starting at the rear of the sanctuary
- No Sunday School

- Members of the Congregation in vulnerable categories (> 60 years old or with underlying medical conditions) are advised not to attend.
- Continuously advise any congregants who are symptomatic or have been advised by public health 8-1-1 to report their symptoms, to self-isolate and stay at home (Fever above 38C, a new cough, or worsening cough, headache, sore throat, runny nose, fatigue, muscle pain, diarrhea, loss of sense of taste, loss of smell, and in children, purple markings on the fingers and toes)
- Church sanctuary, vestibule and washrooms will be completely cleaned after each service
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- Only church members will be permitted to attend. No visitors will be admitted

The current on-line service is well attended and appreciated and will continue.

2. Gatherings:

- **Church boards** or committees may meet in person in small numbers, respecting local restrictions, and with physical distancing. Depending on where meetings are held and the ability to maintain physical distancing people may be asked to wear masks. Groups are encouraged to hold meetings on-line whenever possible. All participants must sign in and out.
- **Funerals** will be held at the church under exceptional circumstances only with strict adherence to public health directives restricting the number of people attending while maintaining physical distancing. People will be required to wear masks. It is within Ministry Personnel's authority (and responsibility) to refuse to participate in funerals where numbers go over the limits, or participants are refusing to physical distance.
- **Weddings** will be held at the church with strict adherence to public health directives restricting the number of people attending while maintaining physical distancing. People will be required to wear masks. It is within Ministry Personnel's authority (and responsibility) to refuse to participate in weddings where numbers go over the limits, or participants are refusing to physical distance.
- **Infant baptisms** will be held at the church with strict adherence to public health directives restricting the number of people attending while maintaining physical distancing. People will be required to wear masks. It is within Ministry Personnel's authority (and responsibility) to refuse to participate in funerals where numbers go over the limits, or participants are refusing to physical distance.
- Cleaning and disinfecting will need to be completed after every gathering.

3. Visitation and Pastoral Care:

- Visitation and Pastoral care will be through phone or other virtual methods. In person visits will not take place at this time. Visits to personal care homes, long term care homes and hospitals are not permitted.
- Should hospital visits be required, arrangements will be made to have the hospital Chaplin visit.

4. Maintenance and administration activities in the church building:

- Only essential maintenance activities and property checks are being carried out by persons approved by the Board and/or the First United Church Emergency Response Committee

5. Accessing Church Buildings:

Only persons approved by the Board and/or the Emergency Response Committee are permitted to access the Church building. Such persons must:

- Enter and exit through the Main Door
- Sign the Register at the door indicating time in and out
- Wipe down all surfaces that they touch while in the building.

Use of the Church building by community groups is not permitted at this time.

Members of the congregation are encouraged to use the secure mail slot to the right of the main entrance to drop off their givings and/or prayer requests or to use online methods for donations or other contacts. Email, phone messages and the mail slot are checked regularly.

Alert Level 1- Government of Newfoundland Labrador

Lifting long-term public health measures will depend on:

- Evaluation of transmission patterns of COVID-19
- Availability of an effective vaccine and/or treatment
- A strong public health system.

A full “return” to in-person worship, in-person small groups, in-person gatherings of all kinds may not be possible until a vaccine is developed and generally available. The health authorities will confirm if/when we are able to have full return.

The ability to participate online will continue to be important for persons in vulnerable categories. Many church members and regular participants are from categories identified as vulnerable by *Public Health*.

Gatherings/fundraisers with food preparation will need to consider all of the health and safety regulations for the Province and the demographic of the event in this time of COVID-19 recovery.

The preceding guidelines are subject to change as may be directed by the Provincial Health Authority, the United Church of Canada or the Board of First United Church.

First United Church Emergency Response Committee

Rev. Ian March-Macculish
Joan Winsor
Carolyn Rice

Cynthia Burt
Harold Sinyard
Gary Gosse

September 8, 2020

Attachments:

Appendix 1

Should the Government of Newfoundland Labrador revert back to Alert Level 3, the following restrictions will apply:

- Gatherings at funerals, burials and weddings are restricted to no more than 20 people, as long as physical distancing can be maintained. This includes the officiant.
- Visitations and wakes prohibited.

First United Church Guidelines –

1. Church Services and Special Events in Sanctuary:

- We are not permitted to hold in person Church Services in the Sanctuary
- We will continue recording streamed services
- Burials and weddings need to adhere to the public health directives (20 people including officiant). However, **NO** funerals or weddings will be held at the Church. Graveside ceremonies may be held as long as numbers respected and physical distancing is practiced.
- Members of the same family or shared bubble may sit together but others must physically distance
- It is within a Minister's personal authority (and responsibility) to refuse to participate in these small gatherings where numbers go over the limits.
- No baptisms or confirmations will take place.
- Meetings of groups and committees should will online.

2. Visitation and Pastoral Care:

- Provided by phone or video conference.

3. Maintenance and administration activities in the church building:

- Only essential maintenance activities and building checks are being carried out by persons approved by the Board.

4. Accessing Church Buildings:

- All persons approved to access the Church building must:
 - Enter and exit through the Main Door and sign in and out. It is strongly recommended to sanitize hands after signing in and out.
 - Wipe down all surfaces touched while in the building.

Appendix 2

Cleaning Checklist:

After each use of the building cleaning with a disinfectant (like Lysol) will need to be undertaken. Some things to consider:

- Thoroughly clean bathrooms with disinfectant including:
 - toilets (inside, outside and around the basin)
 - counters
 - sinks and taps
 - paper towel dispensers
 - door handles
 - light switches
- Backs of pews
- Microphones
- All door handles
- All other highly used areas
- Light switches
- Check hand sanitizer stations, liquid soap dispensers, paper towels and garbage containers.
- Ensure handwashing signs and physical distancing signs are posted.