

# St. James United Church

## Pandemic Recovery & In-Person Ministry



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## 1 Preamble

COVID-19 is far from over. While our physical distancing has flattened the curve, there are still infections and multiple measures in place to help reduce the spread. Many in our congregation are the most vulnerable, and we need to approach our return to in-person worship with caution. Dr. Strang, our chief medical officer, has given us the opportunity for small gatherings, but has reminded us that we have a significant duty of care, and advocates that we do not take unnecessary risks.

In this document, you will find both concrete steps for safety and health, as well as critical questions to help you consider your plan for returning to church. We know that each of you has several factors to consider when deciding your next steps. As we prepared this document, we felt that some might not return to church until we have a vaccine. We will continue to update this document as new information becomes available. We have also presented views from Region 15, the province, and others to help give you background and context. That said, some of the comments are complimentary, and some are conflicting. We have summarized St. James United's position in the last section of this document.

Please note, that the recommendation in this document do not supersede the current provincial and only serve to either strength or align with the current published provincial and federal guidelines.

### 1.1 People of Hope



Like the first disciples, we are waiting to discover God's new intention for us. It would be easy to look backward at how things used to be. Having all experienced the pandemic differently, moving forwards will happen at a different speed and in different ways for each of us. Be gentle with one another – those rushing ahead and those who need longer to move forwards.

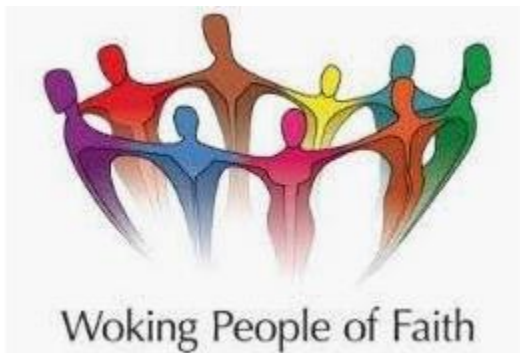
Source: Ready for the new "normal." A discussion paper | The United Reformed Church

## 1.2 People of Consideration

Some families will have had members die during the lockdown phase – from Coronavirus or other causes. Some will have had funerals take place that were far from normal or would have been prevented from attending the funeral. Others will still be waiting for arrangements. Be aware that some will have become vulnerable during the weeks of lockdown, for the reason of poorer mental health, finance, strained relationships, and abuse.

Be cautious about expressing thanks when we can return to our buildings because some will be acutely aware of the loss or maybe fearful about returning. Give attention to this and seek healing for all who are hurting, and reconciliation wherever that is possible. Be conscious that different people will need different approaches and take different amounts of time to begin to move on from the trauma they have experienced.

## 1.3 People of Faithful Discerners



The safety of staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve needs to be at the center of our decisions about re-opening for in-person activities. Other questions to engage the Faith, principles, and values that underlay our decision to meet in person may be:

- What is the need that we are trying to respond to?
- Does our decision to meet serve that need in a way that is a faithful decision?
- Is 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? (i.e., gathering in a way that leaves out vulnerable members can be just as harmful as not gathering)
- Where are the signs of hope?
- Where might we find the green shoots of new life
- What shall we do differently, and how shall we live differently as we work through the pandemic, and emerge into this new season?

## 2 Provincial Guidelines for the communities of Faith



Effective Friday, July 3, 2020, some gathering limits will increase. If a recognized business or organization is planning an event outdoors, 250 people can attend with physical distancing rules in place. For an indoor event, the limit is 50 percent capacity to a maximum of 200, again with physical distancing. Remember, you

can only have the number you can accommodate in your building or your parking lot with Physical Distancing.

Gatherings not run by a recognized business or organization, for example, a family event in the backyard, are still subject to the 50-person maximum limit with physical distancing unless you're in your close social group of 10.

The expanded gathering limits apply to social events, faith gatherings, weddings, funerals, and other cultural events, and arts and cultural events like theatre performances, dance recitals, festivals, and concerts. Guidelines for these types of events are available at:

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Events-theatres-and-venues-COVID-19-prevention-guidelines.pdf>

People can continue to gather in close social groups of up to 10 without physical distancing. People in a group are not required to be exclusive, but they are strongly encouraged to maintain a consistent group. People should not gather in random or spontaneous groups of 10.

Gatherings and events should limit the risk by implementing the following:

- Consider adapting activities which would typically require individuals to be close (i.e., music, dance, and theatre) to maintain physical distancing
- Individuals who are heavily exerting themselves while engaging in activities at the event (i.e., playing music, singing) should maintain a distance of 4 metres/12 feet from all others while performing, including vocalists and musicians
- Consider having vocalists/musicians face away from others while singing or playing wind instruments
- Increase the physical distance between performers and the audience to 4 metres/12 feet
- The number of performers should be limited to soloists or small groups
- Members of a performing group should not mingle with audience members, patrons, venue staff, or volunteers during or after performances

### 3 Steps to re-open our community of Faith

#### 3.1 Assessing the Risk



It is essential to consider the risk of transmission in your setting, within your family, and how it impacts your family members.

Please consider the following:

- What is the contact intensity?
  - the type of contact (close/distant) and the duration of contact (brief/prolonged)
- What is the number of contacts in your setting?
  - The number of people present at the same time.
- Can the space provide adequate social distancing space?
  - Consider your buildings and maintenance capacities:
    - How many people can your building accommodate while maintaining social distancing at all times? Consider all spaces: offices, sanctuary, bathrooms, kitchens, entrances, and exits.
    - How will you ensure high touch surfaces are cleaned and disinfected regularly (especially washrooms)?
    - Are there additional physical space changes or rules and guidelines needed to help participants reduce the risk of transmission that you need to implement? How will you support good hand hygiene?
    - What protocols are needed for rental groups, and how will you work or communicate with them on these protocols? How will you ensure that rental groups will follow through on their commitment to providing your space remains safe?
    - Will your practices be acceptable to your insurer to provide coverage in the case of an outbreak at a gathering?
  - Consider your staff, volunteer, and participants capacity:



- How will you communicate new practices and expectations to your participants?
  - How will you discourage hand-shaking or other physical contacts?
  - What changes will you make in worship practices?
  - If you moved study groups or daily devotionals online, is there an expectation that this will continue in addition to other in-person work? Is it sustainable in terms of ministry personnel time?
- Consider the demographics of your participants:
    - What extra precautions should you consider if participants are at
    - increased risk of more severe illness because of age, or if they have
    - compromised immune systems or underlying chronic medical
    - conditions?

### 3.2 Making a Plan



#### YOUR PLAN MUST INCLUDE:

- Social distancing protocols
- Maintenance, cleaning and safety protocols
- Protective measures and supplies to reduce transmission risk (i.e., masks, barriers, handwashing stations, etc.)
- Clear policy and practices to ensure that individuals who are ill do not



- enter the premises
- An outline of how you will communicate your re-opening protocols and
- practices to your community of Faith, and tenants or renters.

The decision to re-open must be made by the governing board, not just the minister. To demonstrate due diligence, please make sure your decision, plans for maintaining all public health orders are recorded in detail in your board minutes.



### 3.3 Moving through the three stages of opening as per the United



#### Church

The United Church of Canada has developed guidelines for a three-stage plan to re-open church spaces.

- **Phase 1: Reopening the Building during the Pandemic**

Small groups may meet in person in small numbers, with social distancing and masks. Worship will continue to be online only, with some exceptions for outdoor worship.

- **Phase 2: Reopening In-Person Worship during the Pandemic**

Worship and other activities resume in church buildings, with social distancing and other measures.

- **Phase 3: Full Return during the Pandemic**

For worship and other gatherings, you will still need to consider the health and safety regulations of your province.

Each council makes decisions on reopening for its areas of responsibility. The governing board of each community of Faith should consult with its local public health unit, provincial health ministry, and regional council. The guiding principle is the safety of all who enter the building.

## **4 The United Church of Canada Three-Phase Plan during Covid-19**

### **4.1 Stage # 1 Reopening the Building during the Pandemic**

WORSHIP IS STILL ONLINE ONLY, WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS FOR OUTDOOR WORSHIP OR SMALL GROUP WORSHIP.

It is recommended that each group gathering in the building keep a list of all participants should it be needed for contact tracing purposes. User groups would hold their list, they are not required to submit listings to the church, and can destroy the record after 30 days

#### **4.1.1 The Building**

- Church boards, committees, or staff groups may meet in person in small numbers, respecting local restrictions, and with social distancing and masks.
- Churches need to have an initial plan that spells out the provisions for safe opening. They should require the same of their tenants before allowing them back.

#### **4.1.2 Worship Guidelines**

Generally, worship will continue to be held online only, although some exceptions may be made for outdoor worship with social distancing and masks.

#### **4.1.3 Communion**

If communion is offered, best practices suggest the following:

- The officiant and servers use hand sanitizer before offering communion.
- Individual pieces of bread and individual cups are offered.
- Servers offer the bread and cup to each person, rather than each person taking them from a communal plate or tray.
- Each communicant places their empty cup into a separate receptacle.

#### **4.1.4 Passing the Peace and the Offering Plate**

- Social distancing must be maintained. Offering a phrase or pressing hands together in a prayerful bow can convey the message of passing the peace.

- Passing the offering plate should be avoided. Place the plate in the church for people to drop their offering into, and have gloves available for staff handling cash or cheques. Now is the time to suggest that people give through PAR.

#### **4.1.5 Singing**

- There should be no congregational or choir singing.
- Soloists must be at safe distances from each other and the congregation.

Source: A Conversation: What Do Science and Data Say About the Near Term Future of Singing webinar recording.

#### **4.1.6 Cleaning**

After each gathering, it is important to thoroughly clean bathrooms, door handles, hymnbooks, pew Bibles, backs of pews, microphones, musical instruments, and all other highly used areas.

#### **4.1.7 Over 60 or Otherwise Vulnerable?**

- People over 60, those with underlying medical conditions that have weakened immune systems, and those who have family members at home who are vulnerable are encouraged to participate only in online activities.
- Ministry Personnel who are in one of these categories, or who have family members who are at risk should have a conversation with their Ministry and Personnel Committee and their Regional Minister to develop an alternate option where exposure to groups of people is limited and high-risk activities are avoided.
- Clergy who are in one of these categories should have a conversation with their Ministry and Personnel Committee to develop an alternate option where exposure to groups of people is limited and high-risk activities are avoided altogether.

## **4.2 Stage # 2 Reopening In-Person Worship during the Pandemic**

WORSHIP AND OTHER ACTIVITIES RESUME IN CHURCH BUILDINGS ALLOWING UP TO 50 PARTICIPANTS, WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING AND OTHER MEASURES.

### **4.2.1 Masks, Social Distancing, and Limited Singing**

- In-person worship could resume in church buildings where space allows social distancing, adhering to public health directives, and allowable numbers. Masks must be worn.
- Instrumental music can resume, but not congregational singing because it spreads the virus farther than talking. In some cases, soloists may be able to perform. Check with your local public health unit.
- Even after resuming in-person worship, online versions should continue to be available for those in high-risk categories, which need to continue to avoid group activities.

### **4.2.2 Weddings, Baptisms, and Funerals**

Small funerals, weddings, and baptisms may be held within local restrictions about numbers.

- Infant baptism: The parents/guardians of the child should be the only ones to hold them. The officiant will need to sanitize their hands before each baptism.
- Child and adult baptism: Water should come from individual cups or a bottle for each person, not the common font.

### **4.2.3 Administration and Maintenance**

- Maintenance and administration functions resume more fully, but with provisions for social distancing. These might include such measures as alternating times for staff to be present in the office.
- Tenant use of church buildings may be staged back in, depending on the types of activities and the ability to implement appropriate safety protocols.
- Deep cleaning needs to be done after every gathering.

Protocols should be communicated to all participants so that they can make decisions about their participation.

## **4.3 Stage # 3 Full Return during the Pandemic**

A full return will be considered in keeping with NS Public Health and Safety Guidelines, conditional on full vaccination, “community” immunity, or broad successful treatments for COVID-19 being available. Even once public health directives say worship can resume fully, people will require social distancing in the sanctuary and wearing masks.

The ability to participate online may continue to be important for people in vulnerable categories. Many church members and regular participants may be from vulnerable groups.

### **4.3.1 Worship and Gatherings**

Worship services with people in attendance, small in-person groups, and in-person gatherings of all kinds may not be possible until a vaccine is developed and generally available. However, if public health directives say worship can resume fully, people may still want the option of distancing in the

consider all of the health and safety regulations for the province in this time of COVID-19 recovery.

### **4.3.2 Don't Forget Your Online Members**

The ability to participate online may continue to be important for people in vulnerable categories. Many church members and regular participants may be from vulnerable groups.

## 5 St James United Re-entry checklist and Policies

Given the attached information, demographics of our church and vulnerable groups St James United Church, we will adhere to the following policies and dates

- We will return to service as per the guidelines outlined with a limited capacity in the sanctuary of 40 on Sept 13, 2020. If the provincial guidelines change, this number will change.
- Effective Aug 15, 2020, we will permit the use of the church hall with a limited capacity of 10 (given the current group limit of 10) unless the NS guidelines change
- We will allow tenants to use the church with a secondary responsibility of cleaning while the church will be the primary cleaner. This cleaning will mean an additional charge for post-event cleaning. That said, all groups will take their garbage and do necessary cleaning after themselves.
- As per the recent NS provincial announcement all congregational members will be required to wear a mask or face shield.
- As for Sunday School our premises is challenging to have Sunday School. That said, we will follow the NS health guidelines and provide more guidance in September

### 5.1 Staffing and the Ministry & Personnel Committee

Ministry and Personnel Committees have a vital role in the reopening of the churches. They will have a conversation with each employee. We will watch staff with a consideration for a level of mental fatigue, especially for those who have worked to keep the Pastoral Charge operational through worship and Pastoral Care. With that in mind:

- We will meet with all staff and required volunteers to review the new policies
- Check with the staff and required volunteers to see how they are doing and how their family is doing
- Check with staff and required volunteers to see how this time has been for them
- Check with staff and required volunteers how they are feeling about returning to the office (if applicable) and in-person worship
- Check with the Ministry Personnel and Lay Employees who are vulnerable (over 60 or have compromised health) and work with their Ministry and Personnel Committee to develop an alternate option to limit exposure to groups and high-risk activities
- Have the Ministry and Personnel Committees contact the Regional Minister to come up with a plan for return in-person ministry

## 5.2 Caring for the Church Building and Hall

- We will advise any staff or 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
- We will post the symptoms so people can see what they are and know how to assess when to stay 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)
- Will will request that 2 meters will be observed where people sit. We will measure and rope off areas where people cannot sit to maintain physical distancing

For contact tracing (if/when required) for each use of the building, there needs to be a record of:

- o Name and phone number of the people who were in the building
- o Date and time that the gathering took place
- o The purpose of the gathering

After each use of the building, cleaning with a disinfectant will happen. All disinfectants that have a drug identification number (DIN) have been approved for sale in Canada. While most disinfectants will work against Coronavirus, the following list of hard-surface disinfectants are supported by evidence following drug review, demonstrating that they are likely to be effective and may be used against SARS-CoV-2, the Coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

## 5.3 Cleaning for the Church Building and Hall

We will create a checklist of the places and items to clean for your worship and meeting space. We will clean as per the recommended procedure outline on the government website as noted here <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces-eng.pdf>

Some things to consider:

- We will thoroughly clean bathrooms with disinfectant – toilets (inside, outside and around the basin) – counters - sinks – taps – paper towel dispensers - door handles
- Clean backs of pews
- Clean Microphones
- Clean Musical instruments
- Clean Chairs
- Clean Tables
- Clean All door handles
- Clean All other highly used areas



- Clean Light switches
- Make people aware of the hand sanitizer stations and places where they can wash their hands.
- Washrooms will be equipped with hot and cold running water under pressure, liquid soap, paper towels, and garbage containers. Handwashing signs must be posted

## 5.4 Tenant and Group Use of Buildings

- Regarding tenants, responsibility is a joint plan. This plan includes but not limited to:
  - o Cleaning is the responsibility of the church and Tenant
  - o The church will be clean after each Tenant, and added costs will be levied against the Tenant.
  - o Physical distancing needs to be maintained by all tenants
  - o Advise of the entrance and exit they are to use
  - o Only individual rooms will be made available to help reduce the required cleaning needs.
  - o Failure to maintain the health and government regulations may result in termination of the agreement and access privilege.
  - o The group must keep a list of all people and contacts for those attending the event; this must be kept for at least 30 days. Groups need to use only the agreed-upon space

## 5.5 Worship Guidelines Communion

If communion is offered:

Communion is like a buffet and will need to be treated with great care

- Commercially prepared single-serving wafer/juice packages will be available for each congregant to pick up as they enter the sanctuary.
- Each communicant places their empty cup into a separate receptacle
- Physical distancing must be maintained
- Offering a way to have the passing of the peace without physical touching. Perhaps a phrase or pressing hands together in a prayerful bow, a wave, a nod or some non-contact gesture can convey the message of peace
- Encourage people to contribute through online giving, PAR, E-Transfer, or posted dated cheques. Passing the offering plate should be avoided. Place the plate in the church for people to drop their offering into, and have gloves available for volunteers handling cash or cheques

## 5.6 Singing

- There should be no congregational or choir singing
- Soloists must be at safe distances from each other and the congregation

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 cannot wholly contain such forcefully expelled mist. Tests have proven that microscopic 'droplet nuclei' that can carry the virus remain suspended in the air for up to 3 hours. As the science changes, we will update Communities of Faith.

## 5.7 Special Services Baptisms when appropriate

- For infant baptism, the parents should be the only ones to hold the baby. The officiant will sanitize hands before the baptism. For infant, child, and adult baptism, water should come from individual cups or a bottle for each person, not the common font. If possible, have a separate bowl that sits in the font for each individual who will be baptized

## 5.8 Weddings and Funerals

- We will need to follow our government restrictions. Physical distancing will need to be maintained, and cleaning protocols need to be followed

## 5.9 Church Suppers

For the foreseeable future, suppers will not take place in the church hall with sitting. We will have suppers in the form of a drive-thru. Aside from all the recommendations noted in this document, the following actions will take place.

- All volunteers will wear a mask or face shield and clean hands with sanitizer as much as possible.
- All meals will be prepared in a completely sanitized kitchen with kitchen staff following all of the public health and church recommended procedures.
- Gloves are preferred but not a requirement for the preparation of food or cleaning.
- Customers will be notified
  - not to get out of their car
  - that a mask or face shield is mandatory
  - that exact change is required and should be placed in the container provided
  - No customer is permitted in the church hall

Please be in touch with your Regional Minister or your Regional Executive Minister if you have questions or concerns.