

NOTE: APPROVED BY COUNCIL June 8, 2020

This document is intended to provide a plan for the resumption of activities at our church. It is not designed to dictate the timing of events such as reopening the church to various users. When those decisions are made, various protocols are presented as to how best to do that, while assuring the health and safety of all concerned. It is hoped this plan aligns adequately with whatever guidelines are eventually determined by government.

While some people may have anticipated a relatively short disruption earlier in the year, it now appears much more likely that until an effective vaccine is made available and widely distributed, our lives will continue to be shaped in some fashion by timelines and regulations set out by health authorities and governments with respect to containing COVID-19. Our country faces difficult choices in our efforts to contain the virus, in order to prevent a new wave of infections and deaths during a gradual reopening of our economy. With that in mind, we as a church would also not want to unduly influence our more vulnerable members to choose between trying to keep themselves and others safe and participating in congregational life like everyone else.

This document will be revised as protocols and government direction are finalized and/or subsequently adjusted.

As of June 2, 2020, we are currently in a mode best described as “safest at home” insofar as church activities are concerned. Our facilities are closed to most staff and to almost all the usual church activities.

Safest At Home

- Online worship services are offered; recordings are done from home
- Other online/ virtual initiatives should be explored in order to be somewhat prepared for the possibility of further isolation until a more permanent way of dealing with the virus is secured e.g. prayer gathering, spiritual deepening websites, positive news sites, videos pertinent to our emotional and unique way of being in the world, pastoral care through video chats etc.
- Committee and small groups meet online using Zoom or other tools designed for that purpose
- Dropping in to the church is kept to a minimum to preserve the level of disinfection which has been accomplished; facility maintenance, security and repair as required can continue, as well as collection of mail.

Government has recently issued directions aimed at restoring operations at certain non-essential businesses. Direction will eventually be issued which will allow for resuming gatherings for religious purposes, and which will outline the permitted sizes of such gatherings. However, there are other types of gatherings which likely can be allowed at St. Mark's UC, prior to religious gatherings being allowed. For example, at this moment, churches can use their sanctuaries to record or live-stream their worship services; some churches are still operating food banks and other services considered to be essential for the public. It is in this context that St. Mark's UC could consider re-opening the church building to uses other than in-person worship.

Phase One – Strict Restrictions

This protocol assumes minimal usage of the facilities and limited to those which are allowed by government regulations.

Allowed Users:

- Custodian, Office Administrator, Minister: to the extent that critical work and activities can function
- Volunteers: for recording readings, music and worship in the sanctuary if desired and for picking up mail/donations; gatherings must be limited to 5 or less persons
- Contractors: for the purpose of equipment maintenance or repair
- Summer students
- Pilot Project(s) as approved by Church Council
- Prior approval must be obtained from the church administrator or church custodian prior to entry into any of our church facilities

Activities and Restrictions:

- Online worship services continue
- Committees and small groups continue to meet online
- The recording of worship services and music could be done in the sanctuary if desired
- At least 2m of physical separation between people must be maintained
- Community masks are encouraged to be worn, as is currently being recommended for public spaces, unless that person's voice is being recorded. The wearing of masks is not considered to be mandatory, consistent with current provincial and federal guidelines. We also have a limited ability to enforce such a requirement. It is currently considered that a 2m physical distancing is the more important protection.
- Only the south door can be used for entering and exiting the church; check through the side window before exiting to ensure no one is waiting to enter
- Internal doors must be propped open
- Signage with COVID-19 screening questions is required to be posted at the south entrance
- Hand sanitizing is required by all persons immediately upon entering the church, and recommended upon exit
- A sign-in log must be kept at the south entrance door to record all people visiting the church, including staff
- Office functions can resume but must be kept as limited as possible; telephones, desks, light switches, and copier should only be handled by a single person – if handled by more than one person, control panels, switches as well as door handles need to be regularly sanitized; conversations should occur at office doorways, without entering someone else's office
- Kitchen equipment should ideally be operated by one person; fridge handles, coffee carafe handle, faucets, cupboard handles, dishwasher controls etc. must be sanitized after each use if handled by multiple people. A limit of 4 persons can be present in the kitchen at any time in order to maintain 2m physical distancing.
- A dedicated washroom (for staff only), must be allocated and regularly sanitized
- A second washroom for use by others must be regularly sanitized; other washrooms should be blocked off
- Staff must advise their M&P liaison if they come down with the symptoms of COVID-19 and not report to work at the church. Other persons who develop COVID-19 symptoms within 2 weeks of visiting the church, must report that to the Office Administrator immediately and not visit the church building. Using the log-book, it will be assumed that all people present at the church along with that potentially infected person during the previous 2 weeks could become potential contacts, for the purposes of tracing by the Regional Public Health Unit.

NOTE:

- 1 For this protocol, consideration should be given to requiring all key holders (58 of them) to return their key to the south door lock, or as a more expensive alternative, re-keying that door lock. Keys may be retained by staff and perhaps a limited number of others for this phase. Once any announcement is made about even a partial re-opening, the risk of undesirable building entry could develop and a thoughtful communication to key holders should be done. If keys are retained, further thought should be given as to how to ensure protocol compliance.

Phase Two – Moderate Restrictions

This protocol assumes additional usage of the facilities; activities and gathering sizes are limited by government regulations and our ability to ensure 2m physical distancing.

Allowed Users - all those in Phase One with the addition of:

- Council Committee Members and Trustees Members for meetings
- Small internal user groups including Bible Study, UCW Units, Community Outreach volunteers
- Sunday School Leader, Youth Leader, Summer Students

Activities and Restrictions:

- Online worship services continue
- Community masks are encouraged to be worn, as is currently being recommended for public spaces, unless that person's voice is being recorded. The wearing of masks is not considered to be mandatory, consistent with current provincial and federal guidelines. We also have a limited ability to enforce a mandatory requirement. It is currently considered that a 2m physical distancing is the more important protection.
- Only the south door can be used for entering and exiting the church; check through the side window before exiting to ensure no one is waiting to enter
- Internal doors must be propped open
- Signage with COVID-19 screening questions is required to be posted at the south entrance
- Hand sanitizing is required by all persons immediately upon entering the church; recommended upon exit.
- A sign-in log must be kept at the south entrance door to record people all visiting the church, including staff
- Physical distancing of 2m must continue to be respected
- Life rituals such as funerals can resume but must be limited 10 persons or less in attendance; 2m physical distancing must be maintained at all times. Any increase to gathering size must respect government regulations as they are adjusted.
- Office functions continue to be kept as limited as possible; telephones, desks, light switches, and copier should be handled a single person – if handled by more than one person, these as well as door handles need to be regularly sanitized; conversations should occur at office doors, without entering someone else's office
- Kitchen equipment i.e. fridge handles, coffee carafe handle, faucets, dishwasher controls, cupboard handles, stove controls, work surfaces etc. must be sanitized after each use if handled by multiple people. A limit of 4 persons can be present in the kitchen at any time in order to maintain 2m physical distancing.
- A dedicated washroom (for staff only), must be allocated and regularly sanitized
- A second washroom for use by others must be regularly sanitized; other washrooms should be blocked off unless they can all be regularly sanitized
- Any person previously visiting the church who develops COVID-19 symptoms must report that to the Office Administrator immediately and not visit the church. Using the log-book, the Office Administrator will compile a list of all those persons visiting the church over the previous 2 weeks along with that person who became ill, for the purposes of contact tracing by the Regional Public Health Unit.

NOTE:

- 1 For this protocol, consideration should be given to requiring all key holders (58 of them) to return their key to the south door lock, or as a more expensive alternative, re-keying that door lock. Keys may be retained by staff and perhaps a limited number of others for this phase. Once any announcement is made about even a partial re-opening, the risk of undesirable building entry could develop and a thoughtful communication to key holders should be done. If keys are retained, further thought should be given as to how to ensure protocol compliance.
- 2 The question of ensuring compliance with the various restrictions should be considered, for example 4 persons in the kitchen as a maximum (to ensure physical distancing). The risk is person to person virus transmission in a tight space. Masks help but these cannot replace the benefit of 2m physical distancing.

Phase Three – Eased Restrictions (likely remains in effect until the Province lifts all health restrictions)

This protocol assumes complete resumption of usage of the facilities, with possible gathering size limits.

Allowed Users - all those in Phases One and Two with the addition of:

- Internal and External user groups including FOOTPRINTS, community support groups
- Choirs (for rehearsals and singing from the front pews)
- St. Mark's Musical Players (for rehearsals)
- Congregation (children and youth may attend worship but there will be no Sunday School; Sunday School can resume when public primary/elementary schools resume)
- Public (visitors to the office, pick up take-away lunches)

Activities and Restrictions:

- In-person worship can resume subject to:
 - All persons entering and exiting the church for Sunday worship must use the East/West/Accessibility sanctuary entrances and sanitize their hands before entering the sanctuary; a greeter must be posted at the doors to ensure hands are sanitized; all doors should be propped open
 - Signage with COVID-19 screening questions is posted at all doors, advising that anyone with COVID-19 symptoms must not enter
 - Community masks are recommended to be worn by all inside the sanctuary for worship, as is recommended for public spaces, and especially if a 2m physical distancing cannot be assured at all times.
 - Physical distancing of 2m must be respected at all times
 - Alternate rows of pews must be blocked off
 - Traffic flow from the East and West Doors into the sanctuary seating must be clearly marked (requires design), and 2m distances marked off at the entrances and in the Narthex
 - Hymn books and Bibles are removed from pew backs; a small number of these can be available at the doors for those who wish to use them
 - The Choir must be seated along the first row of pews, so any singing is projected towards the dais and not over each other's heads; the congregation may hum the hymns but not sing due to the special increased risk of spreading the virus a much greater distance than 2m
 - There must be "no touch" greetings, communion, passing of the peace etc.
 - No gathering will take place in the assembly hall; no coffee time will be available
 - An announcement should be made prior to each service, to educate attendees as to traffic flow, spacing, not singing, collection and exit etiquette
 - Anyone developing COVID-19 symptoms within 2 weeks of their last visit to the church should advise the office immediately and not visit the church building
- Online worship service recordings should continue to be made available for those persons who are vulnerable due to age or underlying medical conditions, who choose not to attend in-person worship
- Youth Group may meet subject to respecting 2m physical distancing
- Life rituals such as funerals can occur but must be limited in attendance such that 2m physical distancing is maintained at all times. Gathering size limits must respect government regulations as they are adjusted.
- All office functions can resume, with physical visits from the public, and subject to 2m physical distancing and wearing of community masks. The wearing of masks should not be considered as an acceptable alternative to 2m physical distancing.

- All high touch surfaces, door handles, pew backs, need to be regularly sanitized; conversations should occur at office doors, without entering someone else's office
- Kitchen equipment should only be operated by the fewest number of people possible; fridge handles, cupboard handles, faucets etc. must be sanitized after each use
- A dedicated washroom (for staff only), must be allocated and regularly sanitized
- Other washrooms can be made available subject to being able to keep up with regularly sanitizing them

Additional Considerations:

Montessori School – Church House (restrictions will be consistent with those for Day Care Centres and must be followed)

This assumes that St. Mark's UC, as landlords, have no special requirements imposed by government, other than allowing Montessori to put into place whatever signage, markings and other aspects as required for compliance with government regulations and guidelines. The Montessori tenants are to provide adequate supplies of hand sanitizer, soap, cleaning protocols and disinfection products as required.

Sunday School

Primary school-aged children represent a special challenge in terms of maintaining 2m physical distancing. We also have a Sunday School leader who has a vulnerable child at home and who understandably would not be comfortable attending gatherings until there is certainty it is safe to do so. Unfortunately, such certainty will only be obtained when an effective vaccine is developed and delivered to all high-risk individuals. Since it is currently unknown as to when such conditions might be met, Sunday School will remain unavailable at this time. However, this should be reviewed once in-person primary school classes resume. When that occurs, parent volunteers may need to lead Sunday School activities with the children.

Resources

Health & Safety bulletins have now been issued by the Ontario Ministry of Health from which we can take guidance, notably, for office settings, Ontario's Workplace Safety & Prevention Services "Guidance on Health & Safety for Office Administration and Secretarial Staff During COVID-19". As well, Ontario's Public Services Health & Safety Association "Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 for Employers of Office Settings" outlines employer obligations regarding eliminating/controlling occupational hazards, reporting incidents including employee COVID-19 illnesses, and other information pertinent to COVID-19 issues in the workplace.

The team has made contact with several other churches and with the Town of Whitby in order to share information and receive guidance.

Created by the COVID-19 Operations Planning Team

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