

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.

Our church closed its doors on March 16, 2020, due to a COVID -19 pandemic. 15 months later,-our lives continue to be shaped in some fashion by timelines and regulations set out by health authorities and governments with respect to containing COVID-19. 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 is revised as protocols and government direction are finalized and/or subsequently adjusted. St. Mark's COVID-19 Operations Team is using the Ontario governments Step Plan definitions to guide our recommendations and to develop this plan <https://www.ontario.ca/page/reopening-ontario>.

As of May 25, 2021, St. Mark's Council has determined that they 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.

#### **GENERAL PROTOCOLS:**

Our facilities will be maintained and sanitized as required, as mandated by COVID 19 Safety protocols from the Province of Ontario and the Durham Region Health Department.

#### **For Building Use:**

- Signage with COVID-19 screening questions is required to be posted at all entrances.
- A sign-in log must be kept at all entrance doors to record all people and staff visiting the church.
- Hand Sanitizing stations are set up at each entrance.
- Internal doors must be propped open.
- Only the south door can be used for entering and exiting the church; (unless noted differently). Check through the side window before exiting to ensure no one is waiting to enter.
- A dedicated washroom (for staff only) must be allocated and regularly sanitized.
- Other washrooms for public use, must be allocated and regularly sanitized.
- Kitchen Use: Users are required to follow the Health Department Food Safety guidelines pertaining to food handlers and meet the requirements of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

**Building Room Capacity:** Maximum allowed at any time to maintain 2m physical distancing.

- |                         |                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Kitchen: 4 persons    | • Upper Hall: 18 persons     |
| • Parlour: 5 persons    | • Lower Hall: 19 persons     |
| • Stage Room: 9 persons | • Sanctuary: 63 – 64 persons |

**For Building Users:**

- At least 2m of physical separation between people must be maintained.
- Face masks are to be worn, as is currently being recommended for public spaces, unless that person's voice is being recorded. The wearing of masks is consistent with current provincial and federal guidelines.
- Hand sanitizing is required by all persons immediately upon entering the church and recommended upon exit.
- All people entering the building must sign in for contact tracing purposes and complete the screening tool questionnaire.
- Conversations should occur at office doorways. (Entrance to offices restricted)

**GENERAL NOTES:****Sunday School**

We 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 delivered to all high-risk individuals. As a result, Sunday School will remain unavailable at this time. When Sunday school resumes, parent volunteers may need to lead activities with the children.

**Key Holders**

The plan outlines the list of building users. During some steps only essential staff and volunteers are permitted to use their keys. Thoughtful communication to key holders should be done at each stage of reopening. Once an announcement is made about gradual re-opening, the risk of undesirable building entry could develop. Further thought should be given as to how to ensure protocol compliance. For this protocol, if not compliant with the reopening guidelines, the key holders (58 of them) may be asked to return their key to the south door lock, or as a more expensive alternative, re-keying that door lock.

**COVID Reporting**

Staff must advise their Ministry and Personnel 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 logbook, 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 Durham Region Health Department.

## **SAFEST AT HOME: Provincial Lockdown**

- Online worship services are offered; recordings are done from home, where possible.
- Other online/virtual initiatives are being pursued to remain in contact with our congregation. 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.
- Ministry and small groups meet online using Zoom or other tools designed for that purpose.
- Dropping into the church is not permitted 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 at all levels, has continually issued directions aimed at restoring operations at certain non-essential businesses. Direction has been issued which will allow for resuming gatherings for religious purposes and outlines the permitted sizes of such gatherings. For other types of gatherings, such as meetings, groups etc., direction has been issued from the municipality. For example, churches can use their sanctuaries to record or live-stream their worship services. It is in this context that St. Mark's UC could consider re-opening the church building for worship, and for uses other than in-person worship. Churches are still operating food banks and other services considered to be essential for the public, under the social services exemption, with restrictions, as noted. St. Mark's could consider programs such as Food to Go and Footprints4Autism, under these guidelines.

## **STEP ONE – Provincial Guidelines as it pertains to SMUC (60% Adults in Ontario vaccinated)**

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

### ***Allowed Users:***

Prior approval must be obtained from the church administrator prior to entry into any of our church facilities.

- Custodian, Office Administrator, Minister: critical work and activities can function.
- Volunteers: for recording readings, music and worship in the sanctuary, if desired and for picking up mail/donations;
- Contractors: for the purpose of equipment maintenance or repair.
- Summer students.
- Pilot Project(s) as approved by Church Council, limited to 10 or fewer persons.

### ***Activities and Restrictions:***

- Online worship services continue.
- Maximum 15% of capacity indoors for funerals, services, rites and ceremonies.
- Committees and small groups continue to meet online.
- The recording of worship services and music could be done in the sanctuary, if desired.
- Office equipment: telephones, desks, light switches, and copier should only be handled by a single person – if handled by more than one person, control panels, switches, door handles need to be regularly sanitized.

## **STEP TWO – (70% Adults in Ontario vaccinated – single dose, 20% second dose)**

This protocol assumes additional usage of the facilities; activities and gathering sizes are limited by government regulations.

### ***Allowed Users - all those in Step One with the addition of:***

Prior approval must be obtained from the church administrator prior to entry into any of our church facilities.

- Indoor gatherings up to 5 people, following restrictions.

### ***Activities and Restrictions:***

- Online worship services continue
- Maximum 15% of capacity indoors for funerals, services, rites and ceremonies.
- Office equipment: telephones, desks, light switches, and copier should only be handled by a single person – if handled by more than one person, control panels, switches, door handles need to be regularly sanitized.

## **STEP THREE – (70-80% Adults in Ontario vaccinated- single dose, 25% second dose)**

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

### ***Allowed Users - all those in Steps One and Two with the addition of:***

- Internal and External user groups – with capacity limits.
- Council, Trustees, ministries and small groups with capacity limits.
- Choirs (for rehearsals and singing from the front pews).
- St. Mark's Musical Players (for rehearsals).
- Congregation (children and youth may attend worship until Sunday School resumes).
- Public (visitors to the office).

### ***Activities and Restrictions:***

- In-person worship can resume subject to capacity limited by 2m distancing:
  - All persons entering and exiting the church for Sunday worship must use the East/West/Accessibility sanctuary entrances; all doors will be propped open.
  - A greeter must be posted at the doors to ensure all COVID-19 safety protocols are followed.
  - Alternate rows of pews must be blocked off.
  - Traffic flow from the East and West Doors into the sanctuary seating is clearly marked and follows 2m distance marked off at the entrances, aisles and in the Narthex.
  - Hymn books and Bibles are removed from pew pockets.
  - The choir must be seated along the first row of pews; the congregation may hum the hymns but not sing.
  - 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.

### **Phase 3 -Activities and Restrictions: (con't)**

- Online worship service recordings should continue to be made available.
- Youth Group may meet subject to Covid Safety protocols.
- Life rituals such as funerals can occur but must be limited in attendance. Gathering size limits must respect government regulations.
- All office functions can resume, with physical visits from the public.

### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

#### **Montessori School – Church House (restrictions will be consistent with those for Day Care Centres)**

This assumes that St. Mark's UC, as landlords, assumes no responsibility for Durham Montessori School and Daycare activities during this Covid time. Their business guidelines are mandated by government regulations for daycares, and they operate independently from St. Marks' United Church.

### **Resources**

- Health & Safety bulletins have 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".
- 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.
- Durham Region Health Department
- Town of Whitby

The team has made every effort to establish contact with East Central Ontario Regional Council of The United Church of Canada, and the above resources to ensure we remain up to date and compliant.

*Created by the COVID-19 Operations Planning Team: May 2020*

*Martin Bain, Jim Deveau, Denek Konecny, Tori & Peter Hazlett, Peter Miller, David Milton*

*Revised by Covid 19 Advisory Team: June 2021*

*Rev Patti Armstrong, Dee Amos, Lianne Lees, Barbara Lewis, Elizabeth Shantz, Jim Deveau, Tori Hazlett*