

September 16, 2020

Loving members and friends of First Church:

In early July, we convened a group of members and staff for a Re-Opening Task Force (TF) as we look to the future of safe, in-person gatherings of our faith community.

Those persons are:

Meg Dempsey, Cynthia DeRiemer, Jennifer Gartner, Donna Hascher, Clem Lepoutre, Robert Mendelsohn, Andrea Woodman-Osker, Rev. Patrick Collins, Rosemary Lamie, Steve Summerton, Craig Symons

The following information is very detailed and we encourage you to read it carefully as we embark on our next steps toward a safe re-opening. Each of these plans may be modified by the Church Council at the time of implementation as circumstances change over time.

The Task Force has met several times over the course of the last two months and created a phased re-opening plan that follows State and local guidelines, as well as recommendations of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ.

FCCOG is in Phase One - Connecticut is currently in Phase Two of its Re-Opening Plan

Each new phase of the church plan will be implemented after 28 consecutive days of Connecticut's next Re-Opening Phase in order to allow for any necessary changes to our building or staffing. In addition to staggered office hours for the staff, **FCCOG's Phase One** includes gatherings for less than 50 persons in outdoor worship.

8:00 a.m. Sunday Worship in the Memory Garden

Since early August, we have held an outdoor, in-person, 30-minute service in our Memory Garden at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings. These services required online pre-registration and compliance with masked/distancing protocols. Average attendance has been around 20 persons and they have been well received. There is a chance that attendance will increase after Labor Day when people who have been away during the month of August might return.

After a few weeks of holding these services, it is the opinion of the TF that 8:00 a.m. services will continue through September as long the weather is reasonable. **If attendance exceeds 30**, we will change the location of the service from the Memory Garden to the driveway area nearest the main entrance to the church along the cemetery - **still with a maximum of 50 persons**. Such a logistical change is also one of the reasons for requiring pre-registering so that planning can occur each Sunday on where to set up the sound system, piano, etc.

Preschool

As our neighborhood schools implement their plans for combinations of remote and in-person learning, our own First Church Preschool has resumed operation. We have completed extensive physical changes to the Preschool classrooms and airflow systems and enhanced spaces for outdoor activities as well.

Phase Two of the Church Plan (CT Phase Three is currently on hold) Implemented after 28 consecutive days of Phase Three Connecticut Re-Opening

- Outdoor gatherings and small groups of less than 100 permitted
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing required
 - Event registration required to enable proper set-up, staffing and contact tracing
- Indoor gatherings and small groups of less than 50 permitted
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing required
 - Event registration required in advance to enable proper set-up, staffing and contact tracing
- Regular office hours resume
 - Masks required in public areas and when distancing is difficult
 - Physical distancing required
 - Temperature checks upon arrival for all staff and visitors
 - Church office door unlocked during business hours
 - Front desk volunteers return if they are comfortable with precautions
- Indoor worship services resume at 100 or less in capacity
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing required
 - Registration required in advance
- Community Hour
 - Outdoor only (weather permitting)
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing required

There will be the option of allowing small indoor groups. However, the re-opening of the preschool and its in-place protocols - especially related to required cleaning procedures, the TF agreed that groups of any size would not be allowed to use indoor spaces.

For outdoor space, groups of less than 30 people will be able to sign- up to use the Memory Garden between 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. This could include Tai Chi, Yoga, etc. Groups will not be allowed to use any outdoor space during preschool hours.

Meetinghouse Worship

In planning for the resumption of in-person worship, there are a wide variety of issues to consider. These include technology issues as well as set-up, spacing, cleaning and sanitizing, elimination of hardcopy hymnals and bibles, staffing, rehearsal scenarios, physical safety, bathroom availability and many others. We expect to begin with a maximum capacity of 100 including worship leaders and technical support staff. Couples and families may be seated in clusters. Realistically, we expect that in-person worship is not likely to commence earlier than mid-October. Part of the rationale for mid-October is the expected arrival of Rev. Cydney Van Dyke, who then can rotate leading worship with Patrick. This rotation will create an alternate leader in worship in the event of illness or precautionary quarantine after potential exposure. As it stands now with only one pastor, and no redundancy in any staff position, a single member of the congregation testing positive after attending a service would lead to a mandatory 14-day quarantine for everyone in attendance and the potential elimination of online as well as in-person services for those two weeks.

What To Do If There Is A Positive Test Within The Church

- Enable contact tracing and notify attendees
- Quarantine staff in attendance for 14 days

Phase Three of Church Plan

Based on current circumstances, we expect that the following protocols will be in place in Phase Three of Church Plan, implemented after a prolonged period in Connecticut's Phase Three, and/or when a safe and effective vaccine is widely available.

- Outdoor gatherings ≥ 200 permitted
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing encouraged
- Indoor gatherings ≥ 150 permitted
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing encouraged
- Regular office hours resume
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing suggested
- Indoor worship services resume at 100% (385) capacity
 - Masks required

- Community Hour
 - Indoor and outdoor permitted at full capacity
 - Masks required
 - Physical distancing suggested
 - Refreshments served by committees with safety protocols in place

As we have considered our re-opening options and phases, be assured we are taking great care to address the safety of volunteers, church members, staff and all whom we serve. This is the core value at the center of our decisions about reopening for in-person activities. Your Church Council, Staff, and Re-Opening Task Force have been meeting regularly to address questions that have been asked of our leadership. All of us long to be together in our familiar places and we will be as soon as it is safe to do so.

Worshiping in-person is a decision you and your family will need to prayerfully make. Some of you will decide to return to the Meetinghouse for worship and some of you will choose to join us online for worship. Either way you choose, we are still a community of faith and hope. God is still speaking among us.

Sincerely,
The members of the Re-Opening Task Force