

**Faith and Hope Bring Us Home**  
**A safe reopening plan for worship services at**  
**Fort Garry United Church**  
**September 2020**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fort Garry United Church has been closed since March 2020 when the Manitoba Government implemented the lockdown as a measure to control COVID-19. Worship services have not been held in the sanctuary since that time. Our Minister, Min-Goo Kang, along with our Music Director, Helen Bergen, has sustained our worship needs through Zoom every Sunday and more recently with a service on the Church lawn.

During the summer, the Province of Manitoba lifted the restrictions on faith-based gatherings in places of worship but with health and safety guidelines to implement. In hopes of resuming worship services in the sanctuary, the Leadership Team developed a survey which was emailed to our members and mailed to those who do not have access to a computer. The majority of the respondents indicated they would return to the sanctuary with changes to allow for current health and safety guidelines. There was a significant number who indicated they would not return, and a smaller percentage said they might. We do want to stress the point that we all have a choice in making the decision to return to in-person services that works best for our physical and mental well being. Furthermore, we want to assure everyone that when the sanctuary opens for worship Zoom services will continue.

With these findings in mind, we are excited to be planning a safe reopening strategy for Sunday services to resume in the sanctuary. Our sources of reference are the Manitoba provincial government's *Guidelines for Faith-Based Gatherings in Places of Worship*, and *Discerning 're-opening': A conversation and planning process for Prairie to Pine Regional Council*. As well, we obtained consent from Westworth United Church to use their detailed reopening plan as a guide to formulate our own safe reopening plan.

As the overall COVID-19 situation changes daily, the plan will accommodate changes as needed. We present this document as a starting point that encompasses all health and safety measures for faith-based gatherings plus our own recommendations as added precautions.

**Proposed date for reopening: Under Review**

### **Governance and Decision-Making**

The safe reopening of worship services was entrusted to a committee by the Fort Garry United Church Leadership Team. The sub-committee reports its findings and

recommendations to the Leadership Team. Therefore, the Leadership Team is responsible for all decisions dealing with the resumption of worship services in the sanctuary. Substantive alterations and/or adjustments to the plan may be required as changes or adjustments evolve in the government guidelines or by our own experience. Changes or adjustments to the plan must be done with the Leadership Team's knowledge and approval. In the case of subsequent COVID-19 "waves", suspension of in-person worship may be required.

The Safe Reopening Committee will remain in place for consultation until December 31, 2020.

## **Responsibility of Church Leadership Team and Safe Reopening Committee**

### **Communicating Reopening Plan**

The following should be used to ensure transparent communication with the congregation regarding the reopening plan.

- Website, News from the Pews, post relevant signs on church doors, email
- Hold congregational Zoom meetings, to create discussion with the congregation and answer questions relating to the plans that have been put in place. No new decisions will be made.

### **Responsibility of the Leadership Team**

#### **Use of Space**

The goal regarding these recommendations is to keep the areas of the Church requiring cleaning and sanitization to a minimum, and to maintain/ensure social distancing.

Areas to be closed during Sunday service includes the cloakroom, upper hall, basement (except area designated for Sunday School), and library. Signage and the means to block access will be required for these areas. Congregants will be asked to take all belongings, including coats and boots, with them into the sanctuary.

Mats will be required throughout the foyer and leading to the sanctuary during the winter as the floor is slippery when boots will be worn into the sanctuary.

### **Responsibility of the Property Team**

## **Washrooms**

Only one person at a time may use the washrooms regardless of number of stalls. Lines will be taped on the floor outside the washrooms to ensure social distancing. Hand washing signs will be placed in each washroom.

## **Responsibility of the Property Team**

## **Worship**

### **Capacity**

Given the Manitoba Government Phase 4 guidelines for faith gatherings, our capacity limit is 105 (353 x 30%). However, the Leadership Team has stipulated a maximum of 50 at this time. Note that this number may change based on provincial guidelines at the time of re-opening. Capacity numbers include everyone involved in the service; Minister, musicians, tech support, ushers and greeters; etc.

### **Sanctuary Set Up**

1. Maintain centre aisle to allow 25 people in each of right and left side of sanctuary
2. Ensure social distancing of 2 metres between family groups laterally and in front and behind.
  - a. Could involve removing chairs to provide room between rows. Setup is to remain for each Sunday.
  - b. Ensuring family groups are seated 2 metres apart (3 chairs in between) will be the responsibility of the ushers.
3. Front row of chairs must be 5 metres from the chancel steps.
4. Since the Church will be used after our service, we are responsible for sanitizing the chairs, microphone, communion table, etc. at the conclusion of the worship.

### **Responsibility of Ushers and Custodian**

### **Ventilation**

During worship, windows will be opened while weather permits. The ceiling fans will be operating at all times. The sanctuary side and back doors will be open during the service.

### **Responsibility of Ushers**

## **Pre-registration**

As per the Manitoba Guidelines for Faith-Based Gatherings, “congregants should register for attendance at in-person services to ensure occupancy limits are followed. This also allows the facility to maintain lists of all congregants for at least 21 days to ensure appropriate public health follow up. . .”

## **Recommendation:**

### Computer Users:

JotForm is an electronic user-friendly tool that has been designed to easily record the necessary information for Church attendance. Once the form is completed, the congregant clicks “Register” and the form is then emailed to the Registration Volunteer. Every Monday, the Office Administrator will revise the Jotform with the date of the upcoming service, stress that the form must be completed by noon on the Thursday, and email it as Special News From The Pews to those who have computers.

### Non-Computer Users:

The form will be mailed once to those who do not have a computer with instructions that they must be able to answer **No** to all COVID-19 questions every week. They must register with the office every week they want to attend worship. The Office Administrator will take their contact information, ask if they self-screened and email the information to the Registration Volunteer.

The Registration Volunteer will make note of contact information for all who will be attending and any requests for hearing assist devices. The pre-registration list **MUST** be emailed to the Office Administrator and Minister by the end of the workday on Thursday in order to print the registration list and have it available for the ushers and greeters on Sunday. (These days noted can be amended by the Office Administrator to reflect efficiency in this required process.) The list will be maintained in the office for a minimum of 21 days.

Staff, musicians, ushers, greeters, etc. will have to ensure they are on the pre-registration list every Sunday as well.

When people arrive on Sunday, the greeters will then only have to ask if anything has changed with their health since pre-registering.

If people arrive on Sunday who have not pre-registered and if there is still room for them to be seated (i.e. the capacity limit will not be exceeded), the COVID-19 screening questions will be asked, and if all answers are “**No**”, the person may enter.

However, if capacity has already been reached an explanation will be given that they cannot enter, and they will be encouraged to pre-register for the following Sunday.

## **Responsibility of Registration Volunteer and Greeters**

### **Entering the Church**

Masks or face shields will be mandatory for everyone, including children over the age of two and must be worn from building entry to exit. If people are unable to wear face masks for health reasons, they must wear a face shield. Hand sanitizing will be mandatory and the greeter ensures everyone sanitizes their hands from the wall-mounted no touch sanitizer. People may use their personal hand sanitizer within view of the greeter. If hand sanitizer is refused, they will be offered disposable gloves by the greeter. If anyone refuses to wear face covering and/or sanitize, they will be refused entry. Physical distancing will be mandatory, and lines will be marked on the floor/carpet to ensure everyone knows where to stand and the direction to follow.

Manitoba guidelines suggest single point of entry to the building. Using the front doors, people can press the handicap button to open the door. The greeter ensures there is physical distancing and proceeds with the sanitization process and ensures masks are worn. The greeter will direct congregant to the second greeter to confirm that pre-registration information and health answers have not changed and to receive hearing assist device if applicable. An usher will then take the congregant to his/her seat. One household at a time will enter the sanctuary.

Two-meter interval floor markings wide enough to show on either side of foyer carpets, outside, on ramp and in entryway will designate where congregants are to stand. At least one usher or greeter will be required to remain in the foyer during the service in case of late comers.

## **Responsibility of Greeters and Ushers**

### **Bulletins/Reflection**

There will be no bulletins provided for in-church service. This is to avoid handling of paper materials. The sanctuary screen will be used for hymns, prayers, scripture, etc. Responsive speaking, while wearing a mask will be acceptable. If a hard copy of the reflection is to be provided, these should be handed out to congregants by the usher, wearing disposable gloves or sanitizing often. Alternatively, the reflection

could be emailed to everyone and if they want to print a copy, they could bring it with them. Congregants will take home the paper and dispose of it there. The worship service should continue to be sent out for those who attend via Zoom.

## **Responsibility of Office Administrator and Minister**

### **Worship Leaders**

Those involved in the service (Minister, musicians, soloist, scripture reader) must remain on the chancel (socially distanced) the entire service. Anyone speaking must have their own microphone. Sharing of microphones will not be allowed.

If a media desk person is required, there will be only one person at the desk. The person must pre-register, sanitize the desk before and after the service. Sanitizer wipes will be at the station.

### **Responsibility of worship leaders**

### **Music**

There will be no choral or congregational singing. Humming is encouraged. Hymnals and bibles will be removed from the sanctuary.

Musicians must be situated 5 meters from first row of congregants. There will be no woodwind or brass instruments at this time. Soloists must be 5 meters from anyone else.

### **Responsibility of Music Director**

### **Announcements, Prayer Requests, Celebrations**

Announcements, prayer requests and celebrations are to be emailed or phoned in to the Minister who will include them in the service. Congregants will not come forward to make announcements and the microphone will not be passed around the congregation.

### **Responsibility of the Minister**

### **Passing of the Peace**

Congregants will remain in their seats. This will be a no touch moment in the service but the Minister will encourage hand gestures and eye contact with those around them.

### **Theme Conversation**

Children will remain with their parents during this time.

### **Offering**

The offering baskets will not be passed during the service. A basket will be placed on the table in the foyer leading to the sanctuary. The Minister will continue to provide offering prayers/blessings.

### **Responsibility of Finance Team**

### **Exiting**

Congregants will remain seated until ushers indicate they may leave. The congregants will be encouraged to keep moving to the building's exit. Visiting can take place outdoors while keeping two-meter distancing. The minister can leave the sanctuary and go out the front door to stand outside on the step, for as long as weather permits. In winter, the minister can choose to put on a coat and go outside.

### **Responsibility of Ushers**

### **Communion**

As per the Provincial guidelines, "Provision of food and beverages (e.g. communion) before, during or after faith-based activities or events is strongly discouraged..." Congregants will **not** partake of the communion elements. The Minister will provide liturgy as he deems appropriate and will take the elements on behalf of the congregation.

### **Responsibility of the Minister**



## **Baptism**

As per United Church guidelines, parents and Minister will wear a mask and sanitize their hands. The parents will come forward and hold the child while the Minister baptizes the child. No others will be part of the laying on of hands. If there are children from more than one household being baptised, fresh water will be used for each household. The Minister will sanitize hands between each household's baptism. The baptismal certificate, candle and shawl (wrapped in plastic) will be placed on the altar table and the parents will pick them up following their child(ren's) ceremony and as they make their way back to their seats.

The United Church now allows baptism to be a private celebration in someone's backyard if there is at least one other person representing the church with the Minister. In these cases, the shawl, candle and certificate will be wrapped in plastic and the minister will take them to the ceremony.

## **New Members**

Those joining by transfer of membership or profession of faith will stand at their chair and 2 meters apart from other new members, keeping on masks. The Minister, also masked, will ask them questions and they will respond.

## **Confirmation**

Every confirmand and Minister will wear a mask and the confirmands from different households will stand with 2 meters between them. They will take turns coming forward, sanitize hands along with the Minister, kneel and only the Minister will lay hands on the candidate. The confirmand will pick up their bible from the altar table.

## **Responsibility of the Minister**

### **Hearing Assist Devices**

Devices requested on pre-registration will be provided to the greeter for distribution. Devices will be left by congregant on their chair to be picked up by the usher and removed for cleaning.

### **Responsibility of the Greeters and Ushers**

## **Sunday School**

Families will need to pre-register their children for Sunday School. Children will be included in the maximum number allowed in the building and will enter the building through the main doors with their parent(s).

Children must wear masks. The COVID-19 questions apply to the children as well as their parents. The children will enter the sanctuary with their parent(s). The teacher will take the children to their classroom at the appropriate time and parents will pick them up in the foyer by the library. The teacher must remain with the children. If there is a special event being planned in Sunday School, the teacher will meet the children in the foyer and take them directly to the classroom.

## **Responsibility of the Sunday School Teacher**

### **Food and Drink/Socializing after church**

This is not allowed in the church building including the sanctuary at this time. People may bring their own water.

### **Choir room access**

Only the Music Director and designates (musicians, soloists, etc.) will have access to the choir room.

## Instructions for Greeters

### Greeters

- Greeters must wear masks or face shields and maintain physical distancing of two meters.
- Greeters must sanitize hands as often as necessary.

### First Greeter

- Welcome congregants as they arrive.
- Ask if they have pre-registered. If yes, continue with the next point. If no, the COVID-19 questions must be asked. (See below).
- Ask if there is any change to their health since they pre-registered. If NO they can enter, if yes, encourage them to return home and call Health Links 204-788-8200.
- Ensure congregants are wearing a mask or face shield. If they do not have a mask offer them one and remind them to bring their own for future services.
- There is a no-touch wall mounted hand sanitizer. The greeter ensures everyone sanitizes their hands upon entry.

### Second Greeter

- Will check off the congregant's name(s) on the pre-registration list.
- Will provide a hearing assist device if requested.
- Will direct them to the sanctuary to await an usher, who will escort them to their chair(s).
- Will remind them to social distance.
- At the end of the service, will put the pre-registration list in a sealed envelope and leave in the office.

**If someone arrives at the church but did not pre-register, there are two options:**

**(a) The pre-registration is full.**

- Advise that maximum capacity has been reached. Advise them how to pre-register for future Sunday services.

**(b) There is space available. Ask the following COVID-19 questions:**

- Do you have a new appearance of any of the following COVID-19 symptoms, ie. Cold or flu like symptoms such as fever, dry cough,

tiredness, headache, sore throat, runny nose or shortness of breath? If someone answers YES, they will be urged to return home and call Health Links at 204-788-8200.

- Have you travelled to places other than Western Canada and North Western Ontario in the last 14 days?
- Have you interacted with anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms in the last 14 days?

If they answer NO to these questions, ask them to proceed to the second greeter who will write down their contact information and direct them to the ushers.

## **Instructions for Ushers**

### **Preparing**

- Arrive at 10:00 a.m.
- Wear a mask or face shield and sanitize hands as often as necessary.
- Ensure sanctuary lights and fans are on.
- Ensure sanctuary doors are open for every service. Open windows (weather appropriate).
- Get copies of the reflection to be handed out.

### **Welcoming**

- Stand at sanctuary door.
- Ask people to stand 2 metres apart as they await escort to their seats.
- If someone needs a copy of the reflection, wear disposable gloves or sanitize hands each time.
- Escort people to their seats (one household at a time).
  - Seat people on both sides of the centre aisle
  - Ensure social distancing of 2 metres between family groupings laterally (3 chairs between families) and in front and behind.
  - If there is a backlog of people, take some down the hall past the choir room and enter through the back of sanctuary.
- Remain by the sanctuary door during service in order to escort latecomers to their seats.

### **Conclusion of Service**

- People will be asked to remain seated until the ushers move to each row and invite people to leave. Ensure social distancing.
- Encourage people to take home their copy of reflection for disposal.
- Encourage people not to linger in narthex, but to continue to the front doors and visit outside on the sidewalk while maintaining 2-meter distance.
- Pick up hearing devices and put them in the office.
- Ensure sanctuary windows and doors are closed.

## Summary for Reopening Sunday Services

This plan has been developed to ensure the safety of all who are participating in the service, the congregants and family members. **WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUCCESS OF THIS RE-OPENING PHASE.**

1. Before entering the building, a number of basic guidelines must be followed. **Everyone (including staff, volunteers, musicians and soloists)** must answer **NO** to the following questions in order to enter the church.
  - Do you have a new appearance of any of the COVID-19 symptoms i.e. cold or flu like symptoms such as fever, dry cough, tiredness, headache, sore throat, runny nose and shortness of breath? If someone answers yes, they will be encouraged to return home and call Health Links at (204) 788-8200.
  - Have you travelled to places other than Western Canada and North Western Ontario in the last 14 days?
  - Have you interacted with anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms in the last 14 days?
2. Room capacities are based on current Manitoba guidelines while maintaining physical distancing of 2 meters.
3. Masks or face shields are mandatory.
4. Hand sanitization is required when entering the building.
5. Anyone (including worship leaders, volunteers, Minister and congregants) wanting to enter the Church for Sunday service must pre-register with the Registration Volunteer. Upon entering the Church, everyone must check in with the first greeter who will direct them to the second greeter after hands are sanitized and pre-registration has been assured. The second greeter will check off the congregants' names, provide hearing devices as requested and direct them to the sanctuary to await an usher.
6. There will be no choral or congregational singing.
7. There will be no food or beverage preparation for Sunday worship.
8. Washrooms are restricted to one person at a time.
9. General cleaning and sanitizing of the building will be enhanced.

## **Final Remarks**

We will continue to be guided by the health and safety directives issued by the Province of Manitoba, the United Church of Canada, Prairie to Pine Council and our own experiences. Future plans could include larger gatherings for in-person worship.

Please be assured the plan has taken into consideration all aspects of opening with a safe and healthy environment. In the meantime, our worship services continue with Zoom and will do so while some are not comfortable in returning to our Church building.

*Safe Reopening Committee*

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