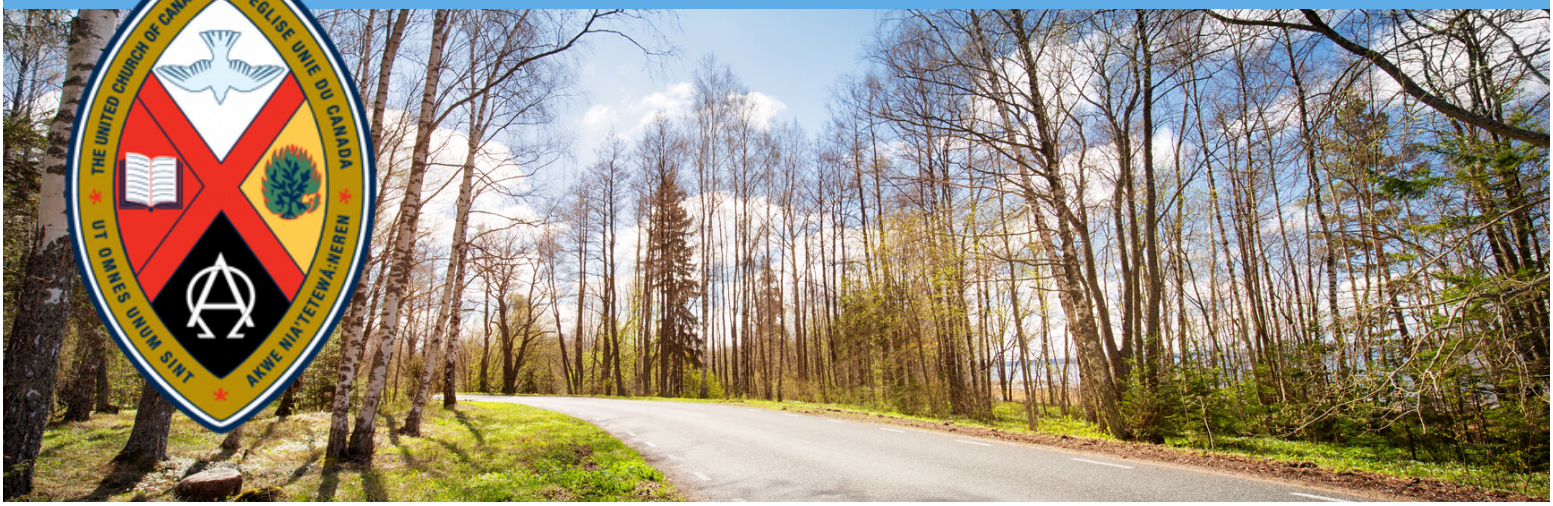
MAY 20, 2020

PANDEMIC RECOVERY & IN-PERSON MINISTRY (RE) LAUNCH GUIDELINES

FOR THE CHINOOK WINDS REGIONAL COUNCIL



BE KIND, BE CALM, BE SAFE.

Friends,

COVID-19 is far from over. While our physical distancing has flattened the curve, infections and even deaths are still occurring. Those who are most vulnerable to COVID-19 are in the majority in our congregations, and as such, we need to approach our return to in-person worship with caution. Dr Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's chief medical officer is giving us the opportunity for small gatherings, but reminds us of our significant duty of care, and advocates that we do not take unnecessary risks. As followers of a Compassionate God, we value health and safety guidelines to make decisions on how to gather as the Body of Christ.

The first part of this planning guide, offers a road map to start thinking about the journey ahead, including taking time to reflect on critical questions to consider what ministry in the next phase of COVID-19 will look like. The second part deals with some very practical issues about being ready to resume, based on the three phases or stages of The United Church of Canada's re-launch plan and current safety and health guidelines. We will continue to update this document as new information becomes available. Presently, I am seeking further clarification on the topic of singing safely.

in the words of Bishop Karen P. Oliveto of the United Methodist Church: "I do not want one single case of COVID-19 traced to one of our churches because we did not care for those whom Jesus loves."

As always, your Regional Council staff are available for consultation and support.

Blessings,
Treena Duncan, Executive Minister

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A ROAD MAP FOR PLANNING

We are between Easter and Pentecost. Like the first disciples, we are waiting to discover God's new intention for us. It would be easy to look backwards at how things used to be. It would be easy to assume that we can get back to that state – and even make plans to "resume fishing on Galilee." Having all experienced the pandemic differently, moving forwards will happen at 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

PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

The safety of staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve needs to be at the center of our decisions about reopening 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 a 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? (ie 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?

TRAUMA-INFORMED

Some churches/ families will have had members die during the lockdown phase – from Coronavirus or other causes. Be aware also that others will have become vulnerable for reason of poorer mental health, finance, strained relationships, and abuse. and still others may have been reminded of past experiences, such as Residential School trauma. 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.

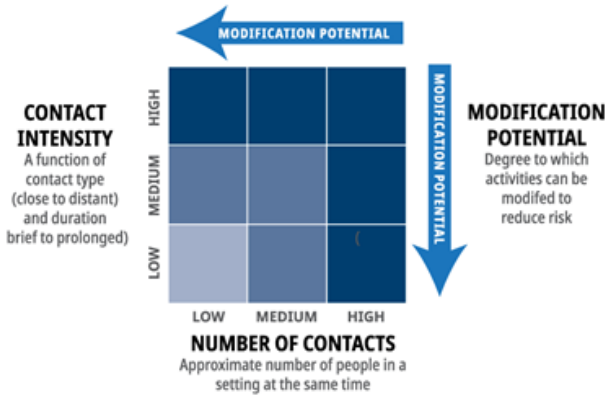
ASSESS THE RISK

CONSIDER THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION IN YOUR SETTING:

Use the BC's Restart Plan Risk Matrix (right) to assess the risk of transmission from social interaction in your setting:

- What is the contact intensity? - the type of contact (close/distant) and the duration of contact (brief/prolonged)
- What are the number of contacts in your setting? - the number of people present at the same time.
- Can the space provide adequate social distancing space?

By doing the ratios (1) and (2), you can position your Community of Faith on the risk matrix below:



Source: BC's Restart Plan.

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 on a regular basis (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 ensuring your space remains safe?
- Will your practices be acceptable to your insurer to provide coverage in the case of an outbreak at a gathering?

ASSESS THE RISK

CONTINUED

"THE NUMBERS ARE MAXIMUMS, IF YOU DON'T NEED TO GO OUT, STAY AT HOME!"

DR BONNIE HENRY

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 contact?
- 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 a more severe illness because of age, compromised immune systems or underlying chronic medical conditions?

Communities of Faith each face unique circumstances – number of people, size of building, capacity for maintenance, demographics, as well as the nature and scope of ministry in their community.

MAKE A PLAN

CHURCHES NEED TO HAVE A RE-OPENING PLAN THAT SPELLS OUT THE PROVISIONS FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

Communities of Faith, Churches and Ministries

- Tenants or renters need to provide their safety plan before being allowed to use the building.
- Use the risk assessment tool and identify and implement modifications or controls to further reduce risk of transmission,
- Develop an explicit plan that for the measures you will implement over the coming 12-18 month.
- Must consider provincial health guidelines, as well as national and regional denominational recommendations

Your Regional staff are available for consultation and support for this process.

YOUR PLAN MUST INCLUDE:

- Social distancing protocols
- Maintenance, cleaning and safety protocols
- Protective measures and supplies to reduce transmission risk (i.e. masks, barriers, hand-washing 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 reopening protocols and practices to your community of faith, and tenants or renters.

The decision to reopen must be made by the governing board with the minister. In order to demonstrate due diligence, please make sure your decision, plans for maintaining all public health orders are recorded in detail in your board minutes.

MOVING THROUGH THE THREE STAGES OF REOPENING

BASED ON PROVINCIAL GUIDELINES, CHINOOK WINDS REGION WILL BE IN STAGE 1 OF THE RE-OPENING STRATEGY.

The United Church of Canada has developed guidelines for a three-stage plan to re-open church spaces. Based on provincial guidelines, Chinook Winds Region will be in Stage 1 of the re-opening strategy as of June 1, 2020.

Given the inherently social nature of Community of Faith events, the prolonged exposure to participants attending events, the demographics of our communities of faith as higher risk, and the safety protocols required to ensure reduced risk, **the Chinook Winds Regional Council is not recommending expansion to Stage 2 at this time.** We do this even though the Province of Alberta has indicated that religious gatherings of up to 50 people or one-third of normal attendance (whichever is smaller) will be allowed as of June 1, 2020. It is our assessment that the risk outweighs the benefit of in-person gatherings at this time.

The Region will continue to be in consultation with public health officials. and the National Church. A move to stage 2 will be considered in keeping with Public Health and Safety Guidelines. While a more aggressive return may be legally possible, we believe it is not a faithful response.

STAGE 1:

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

Continue to follow the

- Alberta Ministry of Health Guidelines on Gatherings -- see specific guidelines for Places of Worship & Singing

and

- United Church of Canada Phase 1: Reopening the Building during the Pandemic Guidelines

- Wherever possible, use online tools to connect with others virtually for services, meetings and events.
- Church boards, committees, or small groups may meet in person in small numbers, respecting local restrictions, and with social distancing protocols.
- Remind everyone to stay at home if they or any of their direct family members (or people they have regular contact with) are unwell.
- Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies during services or events, such as soap, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, hand-washing stations, tissues, and waste baskets.
- There should be no food or drink served
- After each gathering clean and disinfect high touch surfaces such as doorknobs, countertops, bathrooms, backs of pews, microphones, musical instruments, and all other highly used areas.
- There should be no congregational or choir singing.
- Soloists must be distanced from each other and from other participants. A helpful guide is double the usual social distancing protocols
- No sharing of Communion elements, or Passing of the Peace. Use donation boxes or online giving and do not pass the offering Plate.
- Minimize all unnecessary contact whenever possible.
- Tenant use of the building is allowed if provincial guidelines can be met

STAGE 1:
CONTINUED

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

Continue to follow the
- Alberta Ministry of Health Guidelines on Gatherings -- see specific guidelines for Places of Worship & Singing

and
- United Church of Canada Phase 1: Reopening the Building during the Pandemic Guidelines

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.

STAGE 2:

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

Use the

- COVID-19 Info for Albertans

and

- United Church of Canada Phase 2: Reopening In-Person Worship during the Pandemic Guidelines

as guidelines for creating your plan.

- In-person worship could resume in church buildings **where space allows social distancing**, adhering to public health directives and allowable numbers. Masks may be worn.
- Only soloists can sing, appropriately distant from congregants. Singing by congregants is considered a higher risk activity.
- Continue to follow best practices as outlined by the Alberta Ministry of Health and United Church of Canada for Communion, Passing of the Peace and Offering.
- Even after resuming in-person worship, where possible, online versions should continue to be available for those in high-risk categories who need to continue to avoid group activities.
- Maintenance and administration functions can 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. Where possible encourage working from home part of the time to reduce “contact intensity” and “number of contacts”.
- Tenant use of church buildings is allowed providing they are meeting Provincial health guidelines.
- Cleaning needs to be done after every gathering. Maintain high levels and frequent cleaning of “high touch” areas throughout the day and availability of hand sanitizer stands at entrances and around the facility.
- Clear policies and practices must be in place to enable and ensure that individuals who have the symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID-19 including any coughing or sneezing do not come into the building.

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

STAGE 3:

FULL RETURN DURING THE PANDEMIC

Full return will be considered in keeping with Alberta Public Health and Safety Guidelines, conditional on wide vaccination, “community” immunity, or broad successful treatments for COVID-19 being available. Even once public health directives say worship can resume fully, people may still want the option of distancing in the sanctuary and wearing masks.

For gatherings including coffee hour and congregational dinners as well as fundraisers with food preparation, you will need to consider all health and safety regulations for the province in this time of COVID-19 recovery.

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 categories.

Resources:

Alberta Ministry of Health Restrictions on Gatherings -- see specific guidelines for Places of Worship & Singing

https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/reopening-churches-during-covid-19

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