

Erb St. Mennonite Church

Pandemic Plan for Services

This proposed plan outlines how ESMC services could be changed to deal with the COVID pandemic. There are references at the end which help congregants understand some of the choices presented. Note that the plan is expected to change as new information becomes available. We are asking that congregants review the plan and provide feedback via a survey.

Survey:

There is a short survey we would appreciate you undertake in order to provide feedback on the plan. Please find the survey link here: <https://forms.gle/u9R35A9jGxxNPZnV6>
Please complete the survey by Thursday July 23.

A note at the beginning

We would like to clarify one or two things to start with. One is that we do not plan to use the phrase “as safe as possible”. If we did, we would simply continue on Zoom since any level of increased physical connection increases the ability for coronavirus to spread. This is really an exercise in balancing risk vs reward (e.g. improved physical community). That balance point between risk and reward is different for each person. When possible, we have tried to support multiple balance points.

As we move forward with our plan, we are aware of, and worried by, the fact that as time goes on and no cases of COVID-19 emerge, it will appear that our plan is “working”. In reality, it may simply be that our plan has not been tested by the actual presence of COVID-19. Currently infection levels are quite low in our region, but this could change. . We may become confident and try to do more. It is probably best for us to never be “leading the pack” in re-opening. We would like us all to try to keep this in mind during the upcoming months. Our intent is to align our actions with recommendations from Public Health.

With that said, this is how we would like to attempt opening up. We will be reviewing and modifying this plan as we learn more about our current context.

Principles

The following principles underpin the plan.

- Balance risk versus rewards from coming together as a church community
- Support people’s personal risk comfort as best we can (support people to follow through on their own decisions)

Definitions

Bubble: A group of people that interact freely without a mask, potentially passing infection between them. A household is an example. The Ontario Government now allows Bubbles of up to 10 people.

The Plan

We are proposing a blended model for services--both in-person and online-- for the foreseeable future. Congregants may participate in whatever form they wish based on their personal circumstances and comfort. We want the service to be as interactive and as meaningful as possible for all involved. This plan only covers the next few months. By then changing regulations and context may require us to make changes..

1. Everyone is required to wear a mask at all times while inside the church unless you have a medical reason not to wear a mask (at which point we would recommend stay home and use zoom for your own safety) and those under the age of 5 years.
2. If you have any signs of sickness (fever, cough, sore throat, headache, etc.) or if you have been in contact with someone who has signs of illness, stay home (we will not be doing health checks with people attending - please ensure you self-screen at home)
3. If you plan to attend in person on a Sunday, you may need to tell the church (e-mail or telephone) so we can ensure we don't go over our allowed capacity, or we may have to have overflow setup.
4. People, including those leading in the service, can participate from wherever they wish based on their personal decision.
5. A "Welcomer" will hold open church doors for people entering instead of shaking hands. (Welcomers are not necessarily current greeters or ushers, but those are likely the first groups approached. The Welcomer replaces the current greeter role. The current usher role needs discussion.)
6. There will be hand sanitizer available at each entrance
7. There will be a supply of disposable masks if people forget theirs, and maybe some cloth ones to purchase.
8. The Erb Street front door will remain locked for now and a sign posted
9. Try to use washrooms before you come to church so as to minimize contact in the washrooms.
10. Any doors that may be used that can be propped open will be.
11. Pews will be labelled ESMC, SDA (Seventh Day Adventist) and Unused. Each Congregation will use only their pews. Books may be removed from unused pews. (Note, the SDA do not use any ESMC books)
12. Bubbles must sit at least 6 feet apart
13. At most 2 Bubbles per pew.
14. Pictures will be taken of the congregation at some point during the service, and kept for a month, as a way of documenting who was present and where they sat if contact tracing is ever required by Public Health.
15. Guests will be required to sign in and provide basic contact information.
16. People will enter and exit via the closest aisle
17. There will be supplies for people to disinfect their pew and surroundings to their satisfaction if they desire.
18. Exiting will begin from the back row and move toward the front (inverse of typical funeral exiting)

19. People should exit directly from the church. Any physical distanced conversation can happen outside in the fresh air.
20. All children will be required to be with a family adult at all times. There should be no unattended children or teens.
21. Though the nursery will not be locked, nursery service will not be provided at this time.
22. The service will continue in its current form with only 2-3 songs.
23. There will be no collection plate passing. There will be a stationary plate at the back of the sanctuary.
24. There is currently no plan for communion. There will be no communion practised in person until a plan has been determined.
25. There will be separate microphones for service presenters. Likely both pulpits will be set up.
26. There will be a few cameras on stands in the sanctuary - a minor visual distraction hopefully.
27. The HVAC (ventilation) system and fans will remain on, exchanging the air as often as possible.
28. High-touch surface will be cleaned both before and after the service (typically door knobs, stall knobs, toilet handles)
29. Sound from Zoom will be piped into the church sound system, and the church microphones will be piped into Zoom. Thus things like sharing time are accessible to everyone in the church or on Zoom.
30. Zoom will be displayed on the big screen. This will of course show readings and lyrics, meaning no one will have to use pew books if they do not wish to.
31. Zoom breakouts will still occur at the end of the service typically. Congregants at the church can talk outside after the service.
32. All members and guests who attend at the church will be required to sign a waiver (only once) acknowledging that there is a pandemic and that the church cannot be held responsible for infections.
33. Initial planning suggests that, though legally we could sit 76 people in the sanctuary, it is likely to be about 48 practically while observing physical distancing.
34. If needed, the JBMartin room and fellowship hall may get set up as overflow or alternate worship spaces, with screens showing zoom and sound through the church sound system (note that the video may be delayed relative to the audio). Different rooms could have different goal groups (e.g. an at-risk only room). People with compromised hearing will be prioritized for the sanctuary.
35. Mailboxes: they may get used for non-urgent or important physical items, but will not be used for any important communications at this time. We have to assume people do not have access. Announcements will continue primarily via e-mail and mail.

The Roll-out

We will begin with in person services in a graduated manner and learn as we implement our plan. We will invite the following groups of people in the order presented here:.

1. Those without internet for whom zoom is not an option
2. Those who really don't want to use zoom and typically avoid it
3. Everyone, eventually, maybe.

Ideally we would start in August where fewer congregants attend so that issues can be identified and addressed.

References

The following references are useful for understanding some of the thinking behind the plan.

Legal Requirements

We were very careful to note the difference between Requirements and Recommendations.

- Region of Waterloo Public Health
- Ontario Government Orders
- Occupational Health & Safety

Chief Medical Officer of Health Emergency Orders

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/emergency-information>

Waterloo Region Guidelines

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx>

Specifically: <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/resources/COVID-19-Guidance-for-Places-of-Worship.pdf>

Ontario Legal Requirements

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/200263>

Masks (or bandanas)

As of July 13, masks are mandatory for churches. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/waterloo-region-council-approves-mandatory-mask-bylaws-1.5640026>

The main transmission route is person to person viral load, which is a combination of level of exposure over time. Masks have increasingly been shown to have benefits. Even if they don't catch everything, they reduce exposure, increasing the amount of time required to get infected.

<https://slate.com/technology/2020/06/advice-on-reopening-activities-er-doctor.html>

Which led to this interesting example: Suggestive evidence on the usefulness of masks.

“Are pedicures safe? Perhaps they are, and so may be spa visits and haircuts; weeks after two Missouri hairstylists exposed more than a hundred customers to COVID because they worked while sick, [no customer has yet tested positive at the time of writing](#). If this remains true, it suggests that close quarters with masks, which the two stylists were both wearing, might be OK.” source: <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/coronavirus/article243090216.html>

Singing

Probably the articles that seemed most relevant to understand our take on singing:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/5-june/comment/opinion/it-is-time-to-sing-again>

Summary of key points:

- Original assessments were that singing spread things more
- Reassessment blames lack of physical distancing.
- Initial studies show no farther air movement due to singing

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-sag-singing-risk-transmission-rapid-review.pdf>

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/covid-wwksf/2020/07/what-we-know-transmission-risks-singing-wind-instruments.pdf?la=en>

Probably the best reviews of the subject. Generally inconclusive, but leans towards caution.

Our approach was to balance the unknown but potential risks of singing against the integral nature of being Mennonite and the joy it brings to many in the congregation. The addition of masks for all is the point that made us feel reasonable about allowing some song.

Cleaning/Disinfecting

Most cleaning advice here seems to come from an abundance of caution as opposed to evidence of transmission.

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-facts-history.html#link-52bb8dd1>

Section: “We can worry a bit less about infection from surfaces”

Worst cases: 3 days on surfaces (plastic, steel), 24 hours on cardboard

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said since March that contaminated surfaces are “not thought to be the main way” the virus spreads. The main driver of infection is thought to be directly inhaling droplets released when an infected person sneezes, coughs, sings or talks. The C.D.C. recently made changes to its website to make this message even more explicit.”

Waivers

This one pains us the most, but we are in agreement. The insurance company recommends it, and Tim Kennel’s experience convinced us that the one time pain has a good chance of avoiding a low-likelihood large future pain.

<https://church.robertsonhall.com/2020/06/19/back-to-the-future-an-insurance-perspective-on-covid-19-church-re-openings/>

Gloves

A false sense of security. You may still touch your face while wearing them. Better to wash your hands regularly, and especially every time you come home.

Children

<https://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf> suggesting: screen for symptoms, good hand (and sneeze) hygiene, no masks for kids, no physical distancing for kids, non-mixing of cohorts.

General

Risks

<https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>

Summary of key points

- It's about viral load: time & exposure
- Air movements expose those "downstream". Consider what our HVAC does during a service....

Who is at risk:

<https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2020/05/21/the-risk-of-severe-covid-19-is-not-uniform>

Who these high-risk individuals are is now becoming clearer, as research from around the world piles up. Some of the strongest evidence is from a study published on May 7th by Ben Goldacre of Oxford University and his colleagues. This looked at the medical records of more than 17m people in Britain, about 6,000 of whom had died from the new illness. The Goldacre study confirmed previous suspicions that mortality risks are particularly high (after accounting for old age, smoking and poverty—which other investigations have not had the data to do) for people who are obese, who have diabetes, who have cancer or who have received a transplanted organ. Being a man is also risky. The biggest risk factor of all, nevertheless, is being old. People in their 60s are twice as likely to die of covid-19 than are those in their 50s. Mortality from the disease shoots up still more rapidly from the age of 70, so that even healthy elderly people are at significant risk. Data for nine rich countries gathered from various sources by *The Economist* show that care homes for the elderly and infirm have accounted for 40-80% of covid-19 deaths (see chart 1).

Survey:

There is a short survey we would appreciate if you were to finish to provide your feedback on the plan. You can get to it here: <https://forms.gle/u9R35A9jGxxNPZnV6>

We are hoping to review comments on Thursday July 23.