

First's Reopening Plan

Dear friends,

First's Reopening Task Group has drafted a tentative plan to reopen our building and to prepare for when we can meet, talk and worship together again face-to-face. We are looking forward to the day when we are able to worship together again! We know that the church is built on relationships, centered on the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, it is imperative that First has a plan to safely reopen, and to protect the safety of God's people.

The congregational council reached consensus on this plan. This plan has five stages. The criteria used to develop this plan include:

1. Fulfilling the mission to which God has called us which is to gather all people into a life-long relationship with Jesus Christ and to share fully in God's life, love, and work together.
2. The safety and well-being of our congregation and community.
3. The desire of our congregation to be "together" again.
4. The stability and sustainability of the congregation

Data used in developing this reopening plan has come from the Governor's office, the Minnesota Department of Health, the CDC, the synod office and the ELCA, as well as best practices from other large ELCA congregations.

Except for stage 1, we do not yet have specific dates or even triggers for each stage. The timing for shifts from stage to stage will be informed by limitations and dates set by the Governor, the State Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control. So this plan is subject to change.

We also recognize that stepping in to these stages might be a "back and forth" process. Depending on recommendations, we may need to move backwards before moving forward again.

Stage 1

Effective June 1, 2020, the First office will reopen.

- The Ministry Coordinator will work out of the main office
- Other staff will be in the building only as needed
- Volunteers for food ministry in and out as needed
- Otherwise, building still closed and unused areas that have been sanitized will remain sealed off
- Worship will continue being recorded
- Members of our community are encouraged to continue personal preparedness, by washing hands, avoiding touching our faces, etc...
- Physically vulnerable individuals are strongly encouraged to stay home
- Staff will be expected to wear masks when interacting with others in close proximity
- The Reopening Task Group will set expectations and a process for moving to Stage 2
 - The Reopening Task Group will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward, and the staff will make the decision when to move to stage 2

Stage 2

- First's building will reopen on a limited basis.
- While staff may continue working from home, they are also welcome to work in their office space.
- Members of our community are encouraged to continue personal preparedness, by washing hands, avoiding touching our faces, etc...
- Physically vulnerable individuals are strongly encouraged to stay home.
- Staff will be expected to wear masks when interacting with others in close proximity (as per the Dept. of Health recommendations).
- First's office and any areas that are used to record services will be sanitized after use.
- First's Reopening Task Group will set expectations for Stage 3.
 - We will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward.
 - First's congregational council will make the decision when to move to stage 3.

Stage 3

- Face-to face worship resumes (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor).
- We will possibly split worship into 2 times for social distancing.
- If you are not feeling well or have a temperature please remain at home.
- All participants will be asked to wear a facial covering which includes the nose and mouth. If you do not have one with you there will be some available at the church door.
- We ask that your facial covering remains on throughout the church service.
- We ask you to use the hand sanitizer stations that will be provided at the outer and inner entry door to the church. Ushers will assist you to locate it.
- We will enter only through the west door entry off the parking lot.
- When entering, please maintain a safe 6-ft distance.
- Ushers will ask and advise those entering church to maintain a safe 6-ft distance and will advise all to enter and go directly to a seat location that is a safe distance from other church attendees.
- The pews that will be in use will be clearly indicated.
- It is advised you allow for an empty pew/s between each set of attendees, as indicated by the pews to be in use. Two persons per pew can be safely seated at each end of each pew in use. Do not be offended if you are asked to relocate.
- Hymnals and Bibles will be removed from Sanctuary. Instead, we will print all necessary materials on paper for one-time usage.
- The pew cushions will not be used. If you feel the wooden pew is uncomfortable, please bring your own cushion and then take it home with you.
- Congregational singing would depend on current recommendations from MN Dept. of Health.
- We will receive our offering in plates set by the doors, to avoid passing the plates.
- Communion is served using strict safety protocols.
- No fellowship will occur post the end of the service. Ushers will assist the congregation to leave in a safe manner. You are asked to leave the building and not to congregate outside the building.
- Children are welcome to worship with their families.
- Those who are physically vulnerable to the virus are asked to continue staying at home and worship will be recorded and provided online.

- These services will be recorded (possibly live streamed) and made available as soon as possible for those unable to attend.
- Members of our community are encouraged to continue personal preparedness, by washing hands, avoiding touching our faces, etc...
- Staff will be expected to wear masks when interacting with others in close proximity (as per the Dept. of Health recommendations).
- Other large events in the building may resume (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor).
 - Food service for these events will not be available yet.
- Weddings and funerals can resume (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor).
- The Reopening Task Group will set expectations and process for Stage 4.
 - We will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward.
 - First congregational council will make the decision when to move to stage 4.

Stage 4

- Large events that include food service may resume
- Sunday morning fellowship may resume
- The Reopening Task Group will set expectations and process for Stage 5
 - We will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward
 - We will continue to seek input from other community organizations (Chisago Lakes School District, other congregations, etc...)
 - First congregational council will make the decision when to move to stage 5

Stage 5

- First's programming will resume as normal

We are excited to see everyone again. In the midst of this planning, however, we need to acknowledge that the world has changed, and that even when we are past this health crisis, our ministry will have moved into a new stage. And while this creates some uncertainty, and maybe even anxiety, we remain firm in our belief that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Not life, nor death, nor angels, nor rulers...” nor Covid-19, nor quarantine... “nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

We don't anticipate simply moving back to “what it was,” rather we look forward to a new and stronger future.

Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your commitment to the wellbeing of others in the community, and thank you for being the church, wherever you are.