

FAQ Regarding Return to In-Person Worship

As we look with hope toward a day when we may be physically present in worship together, the Church Council has determined it will be guided by a number of important principles in assessing when and how to resume in person worship. These principles are drawn *both* from our faith *and* from the wisdom of science and public health authorities. We share these with you now and ask you to keep them, the Council, and all in our community in your prayers as we await with patience a time when we may gather together for in-person worship.

How is Our Decision-Making Guided by the Faith Vision Frame?

Our mandate is “to follow Jesus in blessing the world with faith, hope, and love.” Worship is central to how we map our mission in the world. One of the central marks we have identified for our missional action is that “Faith Breathes.” That phrase— “Faith Breathes”—has taken on new meaning for us as we have journeyed together through a long season in which we are all affected and afflicted by the consequences of a pandemic, contagious respiratory disease. In this wilderness season, we hear “Faith Breathes” in new way—as a calling to worship God, with all our hearts, in an environment that is safe for the health and well-being of our neighbors, our beloved staff, our worship leaders, and all who are physically present in worship.

How Will We Move Forward Faithfully Together?

The resource “Reopening Church” has identified four principles for congregations to consider as they evaluate when and how to return to in-person worship. As people of faith, who value the gifts of science and knowledge God has given to us, these principles are important to us, too. We share them in the hope that they will support you in praying for those in our congregation and in supporting those called to leadership and healing ministries in this time of uncertainty.

Four Principles for Continuing to Move Forward Faithfully

1. We are guided by God through uncertainty.

On the heels of the powerful exodus, God's people endured 40 years of wandering and waiting in the wilderness. Through this, they discovered they could depend on the manna and water God provided. Today, Americans and those around the globe are enduring our own "wilderness" season. As people of faith, we can draw on our conviction and encourage each other in the confidence that we are not alone because we trust in a Provider who is good.

2. We are guided by love of neighbor.

Recent news featured protestors challenging the statewide legislated restrictions that they felt limit personal rights and liberties. While they may or may not have valid political justification, the Christian faith simply does not support putting self above others. When asked by an expert in the law to name the greatest commandment, Jesus offered an indivisible twofold response, "Love the Lord your God ... Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). As churches consider when to reopen our doors, we must let love for our vulnerable neighbors guide us.

3. We are guided by the best available science.

In Micah 6:8 we are called to "walk humbly with God," the need for which we may feel even more acutely in vulnerable, uncertain times like we're facing now. This humility should lead us to keep being guided by the best available science that enables us to protect our communities. As we keep learning from people who God has gifted to do rigorous science, we will find the best ways to do ministry and worship together while mitigating health risks.

4. We are guided to rejoice and find meaning even in our current trials.

Finally, although all of us are eager to return to "normal," Christians are equipped to find meaning in our current circumstances. Through history, our identity has been shaped when circumstances were not as we would have chosen. Today, followers of Jesus can celebrate and participate in the small acts of kindness and love in a world that feels particularly chaotic. We can call an older adult in isolation or a friend who was just laid off. We can volunteer at a local food bank. We can support local businesses by ordering takeout. As people who have discovered meaning in the person of Jesus, we can live that out even—and perhaps particularly—in these difficult circumstances, as "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

What are the metrics we will use to determine when to resume in-person worship?

- A. The church council met via ZOOM Oct. 13 and Nov. 10 and discussed the issue of re-opening the sanctuary for in-person worship. Many scenarios were considered, including input from visitors attending these meetings.
- B. The church council desires to follow the guidance of our county leaders and public health officials, while also listening to and respecting the concerns of our congregation. Ultimately, we must remain committed to taking whatever actions are necessary to save lives, which includes not only the people who come to worship, but also the staff and volunteers who lead worship.
- C. We have to use good judgement, grounded in facts, for circumstances that are out of our control.
- D. After consulting public health and epidemiological resources, and guided by our Vision Frame and our faith that God is with us through every trial, **the following metrics will be evaluated by the church staff and the leadership of the church council on a weekly basis:**
 - Has the reproduction rate for the virus been below 1.0 for three weeks?
 - Has the test positivity rate been less than 5% for at least 14 days, and targeting lower than 3%?
 - What is the direction of the 7-day rolling average of new cases for the preceding month, i.e. Is it going up or going down?

Metrics can be viewed at this link: <https://www.tmc.edu/coronavirus-updates/tmc-covid-19-patient-summary/>

- E. When all three of the above metrics are achieved, we will then consider a cautious re-opening of our sanctuary for in-person worship. **On-line worship will remain an option for all members and is particularly encouraged for those in high-risk categories.**
- F. Once worship re-opens, the Council and church staff will continue to monitor these metrics. If indications are that viral spread is increasing above the levels that permitted us to re-open worship, the Council may elect to discontinue in-person worship and return to worshipping online only, until indicators improve.
- G. These guidelines will be re-evaluated and adjusted by the church council as needed and will be communicated to the congregation.

When in-person worship resumes, who can attend?

- H. Following public health guidelines, a person may not attend in-person worship if they are exhibiting any of the following symptoms:
 - **Known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19**
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches

- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

For purposes of this requirement we define “close contact” as it is defined by the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC). According to the CDC, “close contact” is defined as being within six (6) feet of an infected person for at least fifteen minutes starting from 2 days before they became ill or, if they are not ill, 2 days prior to the positive specimen collection that revealed the person was COVID positive. Close contact also includes anyone involved in direct physical contact or care for a person who is a probable or confirmed case of COVID, without using proper personal protective equipment.

If a person meets the definition of “close contact,” they must consult with Pastor Kerry before attending in-person worship.

How will in-person worship in the sanctuary look when it resumes?

- I. We expect in-person worship will be a very different experience than what we have known in the past. Here are the rules:
 - Everyone on the campus will be required to wear a mask at all times. **No exceptions.**
 - Members will need to register with the church office prior to the service, to ensure that no more than 50 people are in the sanctuary at a time.
 - Only Staff and worship leaders will use the office entry door (the office corridor will be locked). **Everyone else will use the main sanctuary doors.**
 - There will be no “lingering for conversation” inside the building. Socially distant conversations before and after worship can only occur outside in the parking lot and must be consistent with CDC guidelines.
 - There will be no coffee service, nursery, or lunch in the Fellowship Hall. Note: we have replaced all our drinking fountains, so it is easy to fill up your own water bottle.
 - We will ask that only one person at a time use the restrooms. We will sanitize surfaces between services if we re-open with more than one service.
 - During the service, people will be expected to maintain required personal distance in the pews.
 - We will not pass the offering plate. Offering can be dropped off in a basket near the door. Online giving is also encouraged. <https://faithbellaire.org/give/>
 - If there is singing, **only the worship leaders will sing.** The choir will not rehearse or sing in worship unless they pre-record their music in a safe environment that minimizes the risk of viral transmission.

- People in the pews will not have paper bulletins or the words to the songs on the front screens. We will only use spoken responses.
 - We will include the Words of Institution for the sake of those worshipping at home, but **we will not distribute Holy Communion in the sanctuary.**
 - Our learning life, for both adult groups and children's classes, will continue to be offered online only.
- J. Consistent with our calling to love and care for one another and our neighbors, those who are ill, have tested positive for COVID-19, or who are in vulnerable populations, should refrain from attending in-person worship.

What happens if someone who has attended worship in person tests positive for COVID-19?

- K. Notification process:
- a. **Any persons exposed to COVID-19, in "close contact" with a person who was confirmed to have COVID-19, or who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 are required to refrain from attending in-person worship for at least two weeks after they have tested negative for the virus and are cleared by Pastor Kerry.**
 - b. Persons who choose to attend in-person worship **must** agree to inform the church promptly, if they learn they have been exposed to COVID-19.
 - c. Notice of COVID-19 exposure should be made by calling Pastor Kerry at 832.492.3868 and should include information about the relevant date(s) of in-person attendance.
 - d. The church will then make the appropriate, anonymous notifications to others who may have been in attendance on the same date, so they may take steps to protect their own health and safety. The church office will also notify public health authorities and assist them in any efforts to undertake contact tracing.

***Thank you in advance for your support of these rules and regulations. We look forward to returning to a full in-person worship schedule as soon as it is safe to do so.
God's Blessing to you and stay safe.***