

St. Andrews United Church – Chalk River

Church Reopening Plan

Approved by Church Council - June 10, 2020

Revised and approved by Church Council - February 13, 2021

Overview

(Some information is taken from UCC website <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/safety-considerations-reopening-during-pandemic>)

1. The safety of staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve needs to guide our decisions about reopening any activities at St. Andrews United Church in Chalk River during and post Covid-19 pandemic.
2. It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to affect the ways we behave and the activities we take part in for at least the next year and perhaps longer.
3. Common guiding principles will be decided cooperatively by senior General Council and regional council staff. Regional councils and in turn the Church Council for St. Andrews United Church will implement these principles, bearing in mind regional and provincial health regulation variations in the circumstances at hand.
4. Decisions about larger denomination-wide events will be made by the General Council Executive or senior leadership.
5. Activities and operations around St. Andrews United Church may look different for a while or for a long while. Some things may even look different permanently, as there have been learnings from this pandemic time that we may want to continue such as keeping our online services, maintain social distancing, and providing hand sanitiser and masks/gloves for those who come into the building.

Phase 1: Reopening the Building during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Small groups may meet in person in small numbers, as established by the local health unit and/or the Province of Ontario, with social distancing and masks. Worship will continue to be online only, with some exceptions for outdoor worship as approved by Church Council.

Small Group meetings

1. Church boards, committees and/or staff and volunteer groups (e.g. bible study) may meet in person at the church in a group no larger than established by the local health unit and/or the Province of Ontario. The group shall implement and maintain 2m 'social

distance' between each person at all times during the meeting. All persons shall wear a non-medical mask. Groups may want to have others join them via video conferencing (e.g. Zoom) when they meet at the church.

2. One small group may meet upstairs in the sanctuary when there is no online worship service taking place. The small group shall maintain social distancing with no social visiting and/or loitering in the church after the meeting has ended.
3. Groups are not permitted to meet in or occupy the downstairs area or the balcony. The downstairs area and the balcony are to remain closed or have access restricted to everyone other than the custodian and essential workers until further notice and as directed by Church Council. Deep cleaning shall be done after every gathering of a small group. The leader/organiser of a small group shall ensure that the custodian is contacted to complete disinfection of all hard surfaces/touch points and clean the meeting area.
4. Adequate hand sanitiser shall be supplied by the Property Committee and maintained in the following locations:
 - Entrance/exit area;
 - Coffee room entrance area;
 - Collection plate area/narthex;
 - At each pulpit;
 - Upstairs coffee kitchenette near the sink.
5. Cooking/preparation of food, boiling of water for drinks, and use of utensils and glasses/dishes is not permitted in the building until further notice and as approved by church council.
6. People attending a small group meeting may bring a personal sized drink (coffee/tea/water bottle etc.) for their own personal use. They shall remove the container with them when they leave the building. No food is permitted to be consumed in the building until further notice and as approved by church council. Frequent handwashing and/or use of hand sanitiser is encouraged for attendees.
7. The Property Committee shall ensure that all washrooms, and the upstairs coffee kitchenette have a supply and a visible and accessible backup of liquid hand soap for hand washing, and paper towels with a visible backup, and a large garbage container nearby to dispose of the used paper towels.
8. The custodian shall be supplied with necessary supplies to ensure they are capable of disinfecting all hard surfaces that may be in contact by persons in the building including but not limited to:
 - Doorknobs and Handrails;
 - Sinks and toilets;
 - Countertops;

- Alter and pulpits;
 - Microphones;
 - Light switches;
 - AV equipment switches;
 - Window and other door openers;
 - All other hard surfaces not listed here that may be contacted by occupants.
9. All hymn books, worship resources, and bibles shall be gathered from the pews and sequestered in a suitable area to prevent them from being handled and thus requiring disinfection until further notice and as approved by church council. The Reopening Committee shall gather up and sequester the resources listed above.

Phase 1 Worship Guidelines

1. Generally, worship will continue to be held online only. Church Council may authorise some exceptions for outdoor worship with social distancing and masks.
2. A maximum of five (5) persons, or as established by the local health unit and/or the Province of Ontario, are permitted to be in the church building for the purpose of preparing, delivering, and attending an online worship service. Social distancing shall be maintained during the preparation and delivery of the worship service. Masks shall be worn by those attending. Frequent handwashing and/or use of hand sanitiser is encouraged for attendees.
3. The custodian shall clean/disinfect the church after each online worship service.
4. Baptisms and other services are cancelled until further notice and as approved by church council.
5. Instrumental music may be played during the online service while adhering to the small group limit and maintaining social distance of 2m.
6. Singing is not permitted during the online worship service because it spreads the virus farther than talking.
7. Church Council may authorise funeral services with a limit of ten (10) persons, or as authorised by the Renfrew County Health Unit, attending with social distancing and wearing non-medical masks and in compliance with applicable provincial guidelines. Larger gatherings for 'Celebration of Life' services should be scheduled for a later date and as approved by church council.
8. Online Communion may be authorised by Church Council (See Appendix "A") in accordance with guidelines established by the United Church of Canada. See the link for details about online communion : https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/online_communion_in_united_church.pdf

Other Considerations

1. People over 60 years age, 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.
2. Clergy and/or lay pulpit supply personnel who are in one of these categories should have a conversation with the Ministry and Personnel Committee to develop an alternate option where exposure to groups of people is limited and high-risk activities are avoided altogether.
3. Ministry personnel who are at higher risk or who have family members at home who are at higher risk must exercise diligence in limiting their exposure to groups of people and higher-risk activities

Phase 2: Reopening In-Person Worship during the Pandemic

Worship and other activities resume in the church building, with social distancing and other safety measures.

Masks, Social Distancing, and Limited Singing

1. In-person worship could resume in the church building where space allows 2m social distancing between persons who do not normally live together, adhering to public health directives and maximum allowable numbers. Masks shall be worn under the public health guidelines. Church Council shall approve the implementation of worship details when St. Andrews United Church enters this phase.
2. Instrumental music may continue, but not congregational singing because it spreads the virus farther than when talking. In some cases, musician(s) and soloists may be able to perform as approved by Church Council and as authorised by the Renfrew County Health Unit. The use of pre-recorded DVDs /music may be an option for a worship service. The Reopening Committee shall check with the Renfrew County and District Public Health Unit about singing and the use of soloists before implementing this option.
3. Even after resuming in-person worship, online worship should continue to be available for those in high-risk categories who need to continue to avoid group activities.
4. The church council should provide a supply of non-medical masks for use by worshippers and a means of safely disposing of same when they leave the building.

Weddings, Baptisms, and Funerals

1. Small funerals, weddings, and baptisms may be held within local and provincial restrictions about numbers.

2. Infant baptism: The parents/guardians of the child should be the only ones to hold them. The officiant will need to wash and/or sanitise their hands before each baptism.
3. Child and adult baptism: Water shall come from individual cups or a bottle for each person, not the common font.

Communion

1. Online Communion may continue to be authorised by Church Council (See Appendix “A”) in accordance with guidelines established by the United Church of Canada in addition to the resumption of in-person communion conducted in accordance with public health guidelines. See the link for details about online communion : https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/online_communion_in_united_church.pdf

Maintenance and administration

1. Maintenance and administration functions resume more fully, in accordance with provisions for social distancing. These might include such measures as alternating times for staff to be present in the office/church building.
2. Use of the church building may be staged back in, depending on the types of activities and the ability to implement appropriate safety protocols approved by Church Council.
3. Deep cleaning shall be done after every gathering.

Phase 3: Full Return during the Pandemic

For worship and other gatherings, church council will still need to consider the health and safety regulations of the Renfrew County and District Public Health Unit and the Province of Ontario.

Worship and Gatherings

1. Worship services with people in attendance, in-person small groups, and in-person gatherings of all kinds may not be possible until a vaccine is developed and generally available. However, if public health directives say worship can resume fully, people may still want the option of social distancing in the sanctuary and wearing masks.
2. For gatherings including coffee hour and congregational suppers and ‘Soup and Sandwich’ as well as fundraisers with food preparation, the committee will need to consider all of the health and safety regulations for the province in this time of COVID-19 recovery.

Let’s not forget our online members

1. The ability to participate in online worship during this phase may continue and should be considered by Church Council as it will be important for many church members and regular participants from vulnerable categories.

Appendix "A"

Online Communion

Executive of the General Council For Action

March 21-23, 2015 (pages 169-173)

In summary, the Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee offers the following response:

In United Church polity, the Session (or its equivalent) has final authority for the worship life of the congregation. There are however limitations. For example the Session is not free to change the baptismal formula. The Theology and InterChurch InterFaith committee believes that authorizing the practice of online communion does fall within the authority of the local church session or its equivalent. The implications of online communion, for example, are not so critically significant to ecumenical relationships nor to the integrity of worship within the United Church that the authority of the session in this matter can be limited.

Therefore the advice of the Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee is that the final decision on the practice of online communion rests with the Session or its equivalent.

However, the Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee believes that it would be appropriate to offer guidance to the church concerning the practice of online communion and by implication the practice of communion during meetings of the General Council.

The United Methodist Church (USA) has done extensive work on the issue of online communion and published a series of papers following a major consultation.¹

Their papers and summary

documents can assist congregations in understanding the issues involved in considering whether to approve online communion. United Methodist policy currently calls for a moratorium on the practice of online communion and is based on the following key points:

- Historically, the Church has understood a service of Holy Communion to be a celebration within a physically gathered community. The emergence of interactive digital media raises new questions about the meaning of gathered community and requires further thinking about our beliefs and practices.
- We affirm the church's exploration and use of interactive digital media in the fulfillment of its mission.
- Participation in the Lord's Supper entails the actual tactile sharing of bread and wine in a service that involves people corporeally together in the same place.
- For the sake of the unity in the Body of Christ, the establishment of unprecedented sacramental-like practices (such as online communion) should be worked through in conversation with ecumenical partners, and especially with those partners with whom we already have covenants.

The collected papers of the consultation provide some compelling arguments against online

communion practices. For example:

- Communion as “remembrance” of the self-giving of Jesus reflects God’s incarnational action. The incarnation is symbolized in bread and wine and words (“this is my body”) and in the gathered community.
- Communion is not primarily about “consuming” but about “sharing.” Online communion overemphasizes the consuming of the elements and fails, especially in solitary communion, to lift up the sharing aspect of the celebration.
- Communion is God’s gift to the gathered community. It is based in a communal ethic rather than an individualistic ethic. Its purpose is to “build up the church in love” so that it might be a witness to the world of genuine community. A fundamental characteristic of the communion meal is that the elements are received, i.e. not taken. Communion is fundamentally about sharing a meal. The communal aspect is not incidental.
- The use of “sacramental elders” and the Methodist practice of circuit riders offer an alternative. (They also provide a Protestant option to the Roman Catholic tradition of “reserved sacrament.”) The history of once of month communion (or quarterly) in part came from the tradition of circuit riders who visited communities periodically to conduct

1 These materials can be found at: <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-united-methodistview-of-communion>

the sacraments. Would it not be better to choose a path which emphasized personal contact and sharing?

- The global consensus on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM 1982) is significant. It is important to commit to ecumenical accountability in these foundational characteristics of the universal church. The forms of celebration of the Lord’s Supper need to pay attention to the larger ecumenical consensus.

The Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee explored these arguments in depth. They also noted other arguments that support online communion. 2

The Presbyterian Church in Canada for example, has considered online communion and through its Committee on Church Doctrine offered guidelines for its conduct. In particular the report suggests that:

- Virtual communion should always be built on the foundation of pre- established face to face relationships.
- At least one ordained elder (member of session or elder) normally needs to be present recognizing that some exceptions might apply.
- Communion should be part of a service of the word and part of public worship.
- Use of media needs to be carefully considered (e.g. are the elements clearly visible?)

Their conclusion; “it is the opinion of the Committee on Church Doctrine that such a celebration of communion via various communication media is proper within the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

In exploring arguments in support of online communion, the Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee affirmed the following insights:

- Experiments in online communion give priority to the mission of the church over and above established practice. This option for mission is grounded in the Methodist experience but it also has roots in our other predecessor bodies.
- The ethos and the polity of the United Church give freedom for worship and encouragement for liturgical innovation.
- The church needs to offer opportunities for nurturing faith in new ways for those not willing or able to enter a church building or a traditional worshipping community. With care and caution, as will be noted below, the Committee feels that experiments in ministry and mission using online worship and communion are appropriate, in our time and context.

2 <http://www.umcmedia.org/umcorg/2013/communion/offer-them-christ-celebrating-theeucharist-online-langford.pdf>

The Committee believes that communion is fundamentally a remembrance of the incarnational action of God in the life of Jesus and is meant to be celebrated in the gathered community. As such, its practice must be directed towards strengthening and gathering the community of faith. In other words, online communion should not be seen solely as a personal spiritual experience. While receiving communion online can invite people into deeper experiences of the divine, this experience should be directed towards fuller participation in the life of the community of faith. The Committee believes, in consensus with the Methodist consultation, that a fundamental characteristic of the communion meal is that the elements are received, not taken. This means that whenever possible online communion experiences take place with others physically present. The intention is that the elements are not “taken” but are offered. The Committee recognizes that there must be exceptions to this, in the case of remote or isolated individuals or in experiments in mission outreach.

An example of this would be the situation of elderly shut-ins. It would be preferable for such individuals who wished to watch the communion service of their church online and participate, to be accompanied by a member of the church. The member would be with them, and would serve (and be served, if possible) the elements. If this is not possible however, then the desire for participation in communion should take priority.

Online communion for members of the community unable to be present for communion (perhaps due to illness or travel) can also provide a sense of deep ongoing connection with the community. In this situation again the committee believes that participating with another

Christian is always preferable. However priority should be given to the desire to experience and maintain communion with the community of faith.

In respect to the actions of the General Council, in reconvening the Council with the celebration of communion, the Committee believes that the same principles apply. It notes that the Manual is clear that General Council be convened in a service of worship and communion that is public and open to all. Therefore, if the General Council is convened online in between full sessions, care should be taken that the opening worship be as broadly accessible as possible within the church. An option for this would be to invite all congregations to gather and participate with the members of the Council in the online worship and communion.

Whenever possible, members of the Council should gather in clusters for the celebration of communion, rather than join in isolation. Again, the exceptions of remote or significant challenges in gathering should not prevent an individual from participating.

The Committee welcomes the exploration of new forms of online sharing of worship between congregations. In particular it provides an opportunity to share the gifts of leadership between congregations with differing ministry resources. Whenever possible, the committee believes, the online sharing of communion between gathered communities should be accompanied, in the remote congregation, by a sacrament elder. For example, the fraction and distribution of the elements in the main site of worship should be accompanied with similar action by a sacrament elder in the remote site. If a sacrament elder is not appointed or present the action should be undertaken by a session member or, failing that, someone acting on behalf of the gathered group. Care should also be taken in the positioning of cameras to ensure that the communion elements remain clearly visible.

Finally, the Committee notes the long practice of the Methodist roots of the church in what were once called circuit riders. The intention was to ensure that small and remote communities had access to periodic services and the sacraments. Online forms of ministry, the Committee believes are new expression of this old pattern. However, some expressions of the older patterns are important to preserve, in particular the emphasis on personal contact and sharing. Online initiatives, in other words, should be accompanied by renewed efforts of exploring how personal presence and sharing can accompany and support all experience of online communion.