**Trinity Presbyterian Church**

**Woodbury, Minnesota**

**Phased Approach to Reopening Our Church**

We are all anxious to get back to normal, and that includes getting back to worship together in our congregation, not just virtually. Unfortunately, the medical experts tell us that will be a lengthy process.

**General considerations:**

Medical authorities have said that caution will be recommended for some time under most reopening scenarios. That will be especially true for high risk individuals (those over 60 years old and those with underlying medical conditions). These people make up a significant portion of our members and regular attenders.

If Trinity were to choose to reopen faster than recommended by civil authorities, we may face legal liability by encouraging fuller participation if people get sick as a result. Communications with the congregation must include an explanation of safety precautions being taken by the church, but that there are no guarantees and each individual must use their own judgment in taking the risk to attend.

Trinity encourages members to take advantage of opportunities for online giving and/or mail or drop off offerings, including the denomination’s special offerings.

The Session of Trinity Presbyterian Church has adopted the following phased approach for “reopening”, subject to recommendations or directives from Federal, State, and local agencies that apply. Trinity will comply with governmental and medical directives regarding activities and crowd size limits for our location. The Session will approve requirements for masks and communicate these requirements to the congregation and post the same at church entrances. All decisions on interpretation of this policy will be made by the Session. If an urgent interpretation is needed, the pastor is authorized to do so. The Session may amend or make exceptions to this policy as deemed necessary.

**Phase One (This is where we find ourselves at the time of adoption of this policy, May 28, 2020):**

It may become necessary to revert to an earlier phase at any point during the time this policy is in effect if new infection numbers increase faster than wanted or expected.

1. High risk individuals continue to self-isolate.
2. Continue online-only worship, streaming while maintaining at least 6 feet between participants with the exception of family members living with one another. The number of participants will generally be limited to not more than 10 people.
3. There will be no choir during this phase.
4. There will be no nursery, Sunday School, youth meetings and activities, and in-person confirmation will not take place until Session, considering the advice of the local school district and other appropriate civil authorities, approves. Whenever resumed, appropriate distancing will be maintained, and face masks will be used until Phase Four.
5. Bible studies and other study/discussion/prayer groups continue to meet online.
6. Office staff can work in the church if at least 6 feet can be maintained between them. If staff share space, they should each wear a mask and sanitize common surfaces frequently. Alternate work hours may be advisable for some positions.
7. Volunteer workers (e.g. lawn mowing, honor garden, painting, repairs, counting offerings): All volunteers will remain at least 6 feet away from other people (excluding from the same household). Outdoor workers may use masks at their own discretion. Indoor workers will use masks if there is more than one person in a room. If a worker is in a room alone, use of a mask is at their own discretion.
8. Session, Deacon, and committee meetings could resume at church if they involve fewer than 10 people, and they can maintain social distancing during meeting. Otherwise, continue to meet online only. Even when meetings resume at church, many individuals may be uneasy about doing so. Meetings may be done with some at church and some online. Those attending in-person will wear masks/face covering.
9. Weddings and funerals will be limited to 10 people only with proper distancing maintained and use of masks.
10. The building will remain closed to outside groups, as well as member-hosted events, until the Session, with advice from our insurance carrier, are convinced and declare that this is appropriate because the risk of infection is minimal (likely Phase Three or post Phase Three). When this time occurs, outside groups must sign a hold-harmless statement acknowledging that they understand the risks and accept any potential liability and submit an insurance certificate from a carrier. There may also be appropriate cleaning charges imposed. This restriction may be different for use of the property outside the building.
11. During the summer months, Session will give consideration to holding outdoor worship services while maintaining appropriate distances between family units. If possible, these services would also be streamed over the Internet for those who are not comfortable with an outdoor service.

**Phase Two (after Safe at Home restrictions are relaxed by appropriate authorities and as approved by the Session):**

This phase may not occur for some time, and it may become necessary to revert to phase one or two if new infection numbers increase faster than wanted or expected, or a cluster of cases develop within our church community.

1. High risk individuals and those who are ill are encouraged to continue to self-isolate.
2. We will continue to offer online worship.
3. Before in-person worship resumes, Trinity will poll members and friends to determine how many people are prepared to accept the risks and attend at the church building.
4. There will be no choir, no congregation singing, and no wind or brass instruments during this phase.
5. For those who choose to resume in-person worship, all must comply with the following. Anyone not willing to comply with these standards **will not be permitted** to enter the building.
6. Welcoming will be done with appropriate distancing. A welcoming individual will make masks available to those not bringing their own and will explain our policy to those not wearing a mask (see paragraph b). Face masks combined with other preventive measures, such as frequent hand-washing and social distancing, help slow the spread of the virus. Face masks/coverings are most essential when social distancing is difficult. Cloth face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. We wear masks out of concern and care for those around us.
7. **All will** wear face masks (excepting children too young to keep a mask in place—age 4 and under) that cover both the mouth and nose and maintain physical distancing of 6 feet between family units. Only select worship leaders are exempt from wearing a mask during in-person worship. A prominent sign will be placed such that it can be viewed as people approach the church building that all that enter **must** wear face masks and maintain our physical distancing standard. Inappropriate removal of a mask will be cause for asking that person to leave the building. Worshippers are encouraged to bring their own masks, either disposable or reusable, and to take those with them when they leave. Trinity will attempt to keep a supply of face masks for the use of those who cannot or forget to bring their own. Used face masks will not be stored at the church.
8. Seating for in-person worship must be with appropriate distancing. Ordinarily, this will mean every other pew will be roped off to remain vacant. The Session will give consideration to removing and/or reorganizing pews to seat the most people with appropriate distancing. Immediate families can be seated close together. It will likely be possible to seat approximately 50 people in the Sanctuary with distancing between family units. Additional seating can be arranged, with distancing, in the Narthex, the gathering room, and/or the fellowship hall. Consideration will be given to the fact that the projected screen will not be visible in the gathering room and fellowship hall and may be partially obscured from the Narthex.
9. Ushers or other designated individuals will use a member list/roster for attendance and tracking purposes.
10. Paper bulletins will be available only to the worship leaders who cannot easily see the projection screen.
11. Communion will be celebrated on our usual schedule and held at the end of the service. Individually wrapped wafers and juice cups will be used. The individual(s) preparing the elements must wear a face mask and gloves during preparation.
12. Offering plates will not be passed. An offering plate will be available near each exit where offerings may be placed either upon entry or exit.
13. Passing the Peace will be modified. Rather than shaking hands or hugging, wave or other friendly acknowledgment of others while maintaining distance will be the accepted practice.
14. Use of hymnals, pew bibles and other shared worship material is discouraged. Congregational reading or liturgy will be projected on a screen or printed in the disposable bulletin.
15. The traditional fellowship or coffee times will be discontinued until at least phase three. Congregants are encouraged to leave promptly after the service while maintaining appropriate distancing of at least 6 feet and wearing their mask until exiting the building.
16. Funerals and weddings may be conducted as long as numbers are kept below 50 and social distancing and face masks are employed.
17. Office operations can maintain normal operation with physical distancing and masks and cleaning procedures in place as the pastor directs.
18. Small church groups can resume meeting at church. These should be limited to ten for most rooms unless a larger space permits social distancing. Masks should be worn by all. Consideration should be given to holding these meetings online.
19. Resumption of Nursery, Sunday School, Youth meetings and activities, and confirmation will not take place until Session, considering the advice of the local school district and other appropriate civil authorities, approves. Whenever resumed, appropriate distancing will be maintained, and face masks will be used until Phase Four.
20. Volunteer worker rules will remain in place as in Phase 1.
21. The rules for building use by outside groups, as well as member-hosted events, remains in place as in Phase 1.

**Phase Three (This will be after peak in infections has passed, development of and widely available vaccines, etc. and as approved by the Session)**

This phase may not occur for some time, and it may become necessary to revert to phase one or two if new infection numbers increase faster than wanted or expected, or a cluster of cases develop within our church community.

1. High risk individuals are encouraged to consider continue self-isolation.

1. Trinity may resume worship services in the building for all who wish to attend. We will continue online services for those unable or not comfortable to attend in person.
2. Cloth masks will continue to be required inside the church building for those who are not fully vaccinated, including those too young to be vaccinated, including during all indoor worship. Masks for those who are fully vaccinated are optional. While social distancing will be voluntary at this phase, activities requiring crowding will not occur.
   1. Outside of the building on the church property, wearing of a facial mask is voluntary for all.
   2. Inside the church building and outside on the church property, “social distancing” (maintaining at least 6 feet separation from people not in your household unit) is voluntary.
3. All the precautions regarding communion, passing of the peace and offerings will continue to apply.
4. Resumption of Nursery, Sunday School, Youth meetings and activities, and confirmation will not take place until Session, considering the advice of the local school district and other appropriate civil authorities, approves. Whenever resumed, appropriate distancing will be maintained, and face masks will be used until Phase Four.
5. Singing during worship services while wearing a mask is voluntary. If one chooses to sing, it is recommended to be softly and not full voice when inside the church building. When outside, full voice is acceptable so long as others nearby do not object, and masks are voluntary. It is recommended that handshakes and hugs be only with those in your household unit. Fist or elbow bumps are an alternative with other people.
6. Trinity will continue to project to the screen or print require material in the disposable bulletin. Most in the congregation will not use the hymnals or pew Bibles.
7. Session may consider re-establishing fellowship and coffee time.
8. It should be safe for bible studies and other small groups to resume, with distancing and wearing of masks when possible. Continue to have online participation available for those who cannot attend in person.
9. The Session will consider allowing use of the building by outside groups. When approved, outside groups must sign a hold-harmless statement acknowledging that they understand the risks and accept any potential liability.

[Phase three policy was modified by the Session on May 7, 2021 and again on June 24, 2021.]

**Phase Four (Business as usual following “all clear” as approved by the Session)**

It may be that there will be a “new normal”. The Session will give careful consideration of any permanent changes that are prudent and in keeping with the Trinity community.

Approved by the Session-May 28, 2020

Modified by the Session-May 27, 2021

Modified by the Session-June 24, 2021