**COVID-19 Task Force Report to Session: August 20, 2020 – Amended February 18, 2021**

**Task of COVID-19 Task Force: “Make recommendations to Session regarding:**

* Task Part I: “Criteria, benchmarks, and a phased plan for when to resume in-person gatherings”

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

First Presbyterian Church of Taos will be ready to begin a slow, phased return to in-person gatherings when:

1. Taos County has been in the Green Zone for at least two weeks, AND
2. Protocol regarding social distancing, PPE, and other COVID-Safe Practices have been approved by Session and are ready to be communicated, enacted, and enforced, AND,
3. All necessary personnel, equipment, and procedures to continue virtual worship are approved by Session and ready to go.

At this phase in the re-opening process, in-person gatherings will be capped at **50% of capacity**. Rev. Bairby will keep abreast of plans of other local churches’ plans for in-person gatherings (Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, UCC, etc.) As far as it is possible, we will plan to re-open our doors around the same time they do.

The COVID-19 Task Force will continue to monitor the number of confirmed cases in Taos and trends in counties around New Mexico.

If Taos County moves back into the Yellow or Red Zones, in-person gatherings will be postponed until numbers return to Green-Zone levels.

* Task Part 2: “Guidelines and safety precautions for how to resume in-person gatherings, when the time comes.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**:

When First Presbyterian resumes in-person gatherings, the following **COVID-Safe Practices** will be communicated, enacted, and enforced:

1. All worshippers must wear masks at all times. Those who refuse to “love their neighbors by wearing a mask” will not be allowed to enter the church building. Masks must cover both nose and mouth at all times. (exception will made for children under 2)
2. Family units must maintain six feet of physical distance from other family units at all times. Socially distanced seating will be marked in the sanctuary, and the greeter and volunteers will assist people finding seating.
3. Worship leaders may not leave the chancel area during the service, and worshippers may not come into the chancel area during worship.
4. Preacher and Liturgist will wear plexiglass face shields at all times. If it is determined that liturgists and preachers will speak unmasked, they will be required to mask at all other times in the service.
5. In order to make contact tracing possible, all worshipers will be asked to fill out a form with their names and contact information and place it in the stationary offering box.
6. Worship leaders and congregation members will be asked to monitor their temperature and symptoms at home and not to come to church if they are experiencing symptoms. Greeter(s) will verbally ask all who enter the building if they are experiencing symptoms, such as coughing or fever.
7. Greeter(s) will ask all worshippers to take a minute to review the signs by the church door listing our church’s COVID-Safe Practices, symptoms of COVID-19 and…?
8. All windows and doors be left open during the service for ventilation. A volunteer will be stationed at each door. Kitchen and back doors will be exit-only.
9. Any employee, worship leader, deacon, tech deacon, or other volunteer who is currently exhibiting, has exhibited in the last 24 hours, or has a member of their household exhibiting symptoms of illness (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, cough) MAY NOT come to church and must notify the pastor as soon as symptoms present. Contingency plan for sick leaders of volunteers will go into effect (see below).
10. Worshippers who are part of vulnerable populations\* will be encouraged to stay home and worship remotely.

**Changes to Worship:** When First Presbyterian resumes in-person gatherings, the following **temporary changes will be made to the order of worship.** Suspended practices will be re-instated by approval of Session that they are safe:

1. Passing of the Peace will be suspended.
2. Fellowship Hour will be suspended.
3. All live singing will be suspended.
4. Offering plates will not be passed. Instead, worshippers will be encouraged to place their offering in a stationary box near the church doors, to mail checks to the church, or to give online.
5. In-person communion will be suspended during in-person church services. Instead, a 10-minute Zoom Communion service will instead be offered each one evening on the first week of the month, in conjunction with a weekly Zoom Fellowship Hour.
6. The accompanist will play all music on the organ, in order to reduce movement and maintain social distancing.
7. Congregational reading of prayers and liturgy will be suspended
8. In-Person Children’s sermon will be suspended, but reference will be made to online children’s sermon. If possible, it will be played on the TV during Hybrid Worship.

In addition to these changes, First Presbyterian will adopt a **hybrid format of worship** that allows worshippers to participate in-person and online. This will include the following:

1. Continuing to offer worship through Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube for remote worshippers.
2. Purchasing a high-quality camera and microphone to use for Zoom and streaming.
3. Purchasing (up to $800 in funds has been previously donated) and placement of a large TV on a portable cart at the front of the sanctuary displaying our Zoom-worshippers. Includes purchase of all equipment necessary to connect TV to the internet and make it compatible with Zoom – TV must be “smart,” Hi-Def, and have HDMI port or other way to “talk” to the laptop running Zoom.
4. Purchasing a church laptop for the digital technician to use to run Zoom Worship and interface with Zoom user.
5. Securing and training tech deacon(s) to run camera, computer, streaming, and Zoom, including interacting with Zoom participants to receive prayer requests, etc. – NOTE: This may need to be a paid position(s).

**DIGITAL TECHNICIAN POSITION JOB DESCRIPTION**

The Digital Technician position is a part-time, independent contractor position for when the church returns to in-person worship. The technician must have the ability to manage audiovisual electronics, including digital equipment, and be proficient with Zoom, Facebook and YouTube.

**Job requirements:**

* Setting up, running and recording Sunday morning worship services on both Zoom and Facebook. Monitoring proceedings to ensure things run smoothly.
* Transferring video of worship service and music to YouTube for future viewing.
* Ability to switch between competing video or audio inputs, and mix audio levels to achieve proper sound levels
* Before installing or setting up equipment required by **church**, creating a layout and advising audiovisual use and needs.
* Examining multimedia systems to ensure these systems are performing as required. Fixing smaller problems and reporting needs for major repair.
* Recording, compressing and archiving video.
* Ability to train others to use the multimedia equipment at their disposal.

Compensation: For 2 hours work Sunday mornings $30.

**Bathrooms**: Bathrooms will be open during the phased re-opening process. Only one person will be allowed in each bathroom at a time. Doors will lock and/or have an “occupied/unoccupied” sign. Six-foot physical distancing lines will be marked on the floor outside for those waiting for the bathroom.

Signs will be displayed both inside bathrooms and directly outside bathrooms (for those waiting in line) outlining proper hand-washing procedures, as well as instructions for handling faucets and doorknobs with a sanitary wipe (if available) paper towel.

Information about bathroom procedures will be communicated ahead of time via email communication.

**Parking Lot**: Spaces will be marked six feet apart for family units to stand in the event of a line at the entrance to the church. A sign will be posted at the entrance to the church parking lot instructing people to wear masks and maintain social distancing while in the parking lot. COVID-19 Task Force will observe level of congregational compliance to determine if a parking lot monitor is necessary.

**Youth and Children’s Programs**: In the initial phase of return to in-person gatherings, activities for youth and children will take place virtually. Children’s Sunday school during worship will not resume until later in the reopening process.

**Communication**: The safety protocols listed above will be communicated many through advance communication (email and Zoom worship), verbal communication by greeter and volunteers, and signs inside and outside the church. Detailed plans for communication and signage will be developed when it is determined that we are closer in time to resuming in-person worship.

**COVID-Safe Practice Volunteers**: At least 3 CSP-Volunteers will be needed for each worship service, along with 3 on-call volunteers. If any of the volunteers scheduled for a given Sunday shows COVID-symptoms themselves or has someone in their household showing symptoms. These 3 volunteers and 3 on-call volunteers may not include worship leaders (pastor, liturgist, music minister, organist, and digital technician.

Those volunteers will be:

1. The greeter
2. The Deacon on Duty
3. 1 additional ‘usher-at-large’

A survey will be sent to the congregation in the months before returning to in-person worship gathering the names of those who feel comfortable performing these roles of CSP volunteers. All volunteers will receive training and PPE (masks and face shields).

Volunteers and on-call volunteers should always be in place by one week before the service in question.

Any employee, worship leader, volunteer who is currently exhibiting, has exhibited in the last 24 hours, or has a member of their household exhibiting symptoms of illness (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, cough) MAY NOT come to church and must notify the pastor as soon as symptoms present. Contingency plan for sick leaders of volunteers will go into effect – in this case calling the on-call volunteers.

**Sanitation and Disinfecting Procedures**:

COVID-19 Task Force Procedures for Weekly Cleaning and Disinfecting

Reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by cleaning and disinfecting is an important part of reopening our church and requires careful planning. Since the church sanctuary will be unoccupied for seven days between services, it will only need the following routine of cleaning and disinfecting. This is because the virus causing COVID-19 has not been shown to survive on surfaces longer than this time.

Recommendations:

* That cleaning staff are trained on appropriate use of cleaning and disinfection chemicals.
* That the sanctuary be cleaned and disinfected Sunday or Monday following a Sunday service.

Cleaning

* Wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect.
* Clean surfaces with soap and water, then use disinfectant.
* Cleaning with soap and water reduces the number of germs, dirt and impurities on the surface.

Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces.

* Routine cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces such as light switches, handles, toilets, faucets and sinks

Disinfecting

* Use EPA-registered household disinfectant.
* Follow directions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product.
* Wear skin protection and consider eye protection.
* Ensure adequate ventilation

**Outside Groups Using the Building**: Use of the front or back building by outside groups will be suspended until the CDC and NM COVID-Safe Practices deem medium-to-large group indoor gatherings safe again. When outside groups return to the building, each group will be given a copy of First Presbyterian Church of Taos’ COVID-Safe Practices, and a representative from each group must sign an updated waiver agreeing to compliance with these CSPs before the group is allowed to resume building use. In addition to adhering to FPC Taos CSPs, groups must maintain strict adherence to state rules regarding percentage of maximum occupancy allowed in indoor spaces.

**Contingency Plans**:

**If a Worship Leader exhibits COVID symptoms and cannot come to worship**:

1. Preacher can preach remotely via Zoom
2. Music minister can lead remotely via Zoom
3. Organist can be replaced by recorded Music
4. Liturgist can be replaced by Music Minister or on-call liturgist
5. On-Call Digital Technician can be called in for Digital Technician

**If Someone Gets Sick (COVID or non-COVID symptoms)** **During Worship**:

1. In case of life-threatening symptoms, 911 will be called.
2. In case of non-life-threatening symptoms, an usher in mask and gloves will escort the worshiper to the kitchen (curtain off window and door to kitchen) and make sure they have arrangements to get home or to a medical facility. If the worshiper has children, a second volunteer will make sure the children are not left unattended. The pastor will follow up with the worshiper who fell ill the day after worship.
3. If the worshiper who gets sick tests positive for COVID, SOP for COVID Positive Notification will go into effect.
4. Plan for response if someone becomes ill in worship will be communicated in signage and prior email communication so that worshipers are informed of procedures.

**If Someone Has a Coughing Fit During Worship**: An usher in mask and gloves will come to the worshiper’s seat and escort them to the nearest exit. Volunteers will be equipped with cough drops. Worshiper will be asked to stay outside of the building until the coughing has stopped. Plan for response to coughing will be on signage and all advance communication so that worshipers know what to expect.

**If a COVID-positive person has been in the building**:

Standard Operating Procedure for COVID positive Test Notification

Scope: This procedure applies to the notification of worshippers present the same day as the person reported to have a positive test for COVID-19.

Principles:

1. Confidentiality of the individual

As few people as possible should have knowledge of the identity of the person.

2. Notification should occur within 24 hours of the report

Procedure:

1. Church office is notified by the individual that they have tested positive for COVID-19. To protect the privacy of the individual, callers should ask to speak to the pastor and disclose the identity of the COVID-positive worshipper only to pastor. Church Administrator, and any other employees or volunteers in the office will be informed in advance that the identity of the individual is confidential, should it be revealed to them.
   1. Alternative notification acceptable:
      1. Family member or partner notifies the church if the affected person cannot make the communication.
2. Church office matches the date of attendance with the attendance cards
3. Email sent (where available) AND telephone calls made to the all in attendance that day.
   1. Document time of call and the response. At least 3 calls made to each attendee or family unit and documented.
4. Record the response and the identity of the contacted individual.
5. The responses of the list of attendees will be recorded and reported to the session (and to the health department).

Script for callers:

Hello, this is. \_\_\_\_\_\_ calling from First Presbyterian Church. The list of worshippers from (Date) has your (name, family) listed and I’m calling to let you know we have been notified that an individual present at that service has subsequently tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. We believe the precautions that have been taken minimize the risk of transmission, but we recommend you contact your primary care provider or the New Mexico Department of Health for advice on being tested. You may receive an e-mail in addition to this call to ensure you have been contacted. I will try to answer any questions you may have.

FAQs

1. Who was it?
   1. For confidentiality reasons I can’t reveal the name (or, I don’t know the identity of the individual)—the fact they were at the service is the important information.

***Given the ever-changing nature and our ever-improving knowledge of COVID-19, the Task Force will reconvene as needed to revise and update recommendations.***