**COVID-19 Preparedness Plan**

**Eden Prairie United Methodist Church**

PREFACE

Both the State of Minnesota and Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church provide standards for a phased re-gathering plan. Our guidelines are based primarily upon these two sets of standards. We will also consider additional scientific information as our understanding of COVID-19 and its variants evolves. Adjustments in guidelines will be made as changing conditions may warrant and as directives from the state and from the Annual Conference permit.

Standards relating to the use of face coverings were established in 2020 by Executive Order [EO] 20-81 and have been incorporated in more recent state directives. EO 21-01, in effect on January 10, 2021, required a ten part Preparedness Plan; EO 21-07 issued in February expanded this to twelve parts. The Plan below is organized to comply with these directives.

The Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church provides standards for a phased re-gathering plan. In March 2021, the “Orange” phase remains in effect.

The state and church standards have a number of detailed requirements and suggestions on specific topics like singing, communion, sanitizing, etc. We will review these standards and attempt to incorporate them in our practices, even though they may not be specifically detailed in this document. We will attempt to post on the church website the documents that we are reviewing so that they are available to everyone.

It is our goal is to return both to in-person worship and to all other community activities and services. We intend to reach this goal by following policies that value the safety of staff and of all community members.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

**All church gatherings**: The following guidelines will apply

Stay home when sick or when recently in close contact with one having COVID.

Stay at least six (6) feet apart from other people who are not in your family group.

Wear face coverings for all indoor gatherings.

Wear face coverings for outdoor gatherings when six (6) feet of social distancing cannot be maintained.

**Social gatherings with food:** such gatherings are currently under substantial restrictions. For indoor gatherings, the group is limited to two households and a maximum of 10 people. For outdoor gatherings, the group is limited three households and 15 people. These limits apply even if the gatherings are in private homes rather than in the church. See EO-21-01. Consequently, so long as these restrictions are in place, EPUMC will not be hosting or sponsoring any in-person gatherings where food is served.

**Activities with children:** Since it is often difficult for children to keep in mind the six (6) foot social distancing standard, EPUMC will generally sponsor gatherings involving children only if a parent or adult can accompany the child. Generally, this policy will apply to children in fifth grade or younger. Youth groups involving those in sixth grade or above can follow the policies in place for adults.

**Church groups of ten or fewer people:** In order to follow the policies of the Annual Conference in the “Orange” phase, the following general rules will be used for church groups of ten or fewer people.

1. Virtual meetings will be preferred if the group determines that it can achieve its objectives without having in-person gatherings.
2. If in-person gatherings are judged by the group to be appropriate, the preference would be for out-door meetings.
3. Indoor meetings are permitted if judged by the group to be appropriate and if an out-door gathering is judged to be impractical.
4. The church has two meeting areas that can provide appropriate social distancing at in-door meetings for groups of ten or fewer. To permit adequate sanitizing, only one meeting per day will occur in each room. In scheduling gatherings, attempts will be made to limit interactions between groups and to limit any congregating as people come to and go from the gatherings.
5. Within any group, there will be individuals with different COVID risk factors and with different comfort levels related to participation in group events. It is our goal in all church activities to be both inclusive and respectful. Accommodations should be readily made to allow people to participate in any group in a manner that is both welcoming and safe.

Twelve Part Preparedness Plan

The guidelines below are based upon EO 21-01 and EO 21-07. These Executive Orders can be consulted for additional information and details. However, when the “Orange Phase” re-gathering plan from the Annual Conference has more restrictive standards, those standards will be the ones used.

EO 21-07 provides the following twelve sections for the Preparedness Plan.

1. Health Screening

Workers who know that they have been exposed to COVID-19 shall report that fact to the pastor. The potentially infectious worker is not to report to the workplace until an appropriate period of isolation or quarantine has been completed, in compliance with MDH (Minnesota Department of Health) Guidance.

1. Social Distancing

Workers who are able to work from home are expected to do so, and virtual services and meetings as opposed to in-person exchanges are preferred to the extent possible.

Six (6) feet of social distancing between members of different households should be maintained at all gatherings, whether indoor or outdoor. (At worship services, state guidelines do permit communion, with recommendations for not-sharing cups and for hand-to-hand distribution.)

1. Occupant Capacity

Worship services are currently limited (Annual Conference – Orange Phase) to a maximum of 50 people. We will ask that people not attend services if they are sick or have recently been exposed to COVID-19.

1. Hand Hygiene Practices

We will attempt to follow the recommendation that hand sanitizer be provided at the entrance to the church and at other prominent locations.

Appropriate signage concerning handwashing and sanitizing will be posted.

1. Food and Beverages

The church will not be sponsoring events that include food or beverages so long as current restrictions are in effect.

1. Face Coverings

Face coverings are to be used for all indoor gatherings and for outdoor gatherings when six (6) foot social distancing cannot be maintained. The church is to ensure that face coverings are used by asking people to bring their own or by being prepared to offer face coverings for use.

The state has additional guidelines related to singing, which we will observe.

* A performer may be without face covering while performing so long as social distancing is maintained; should wear face covering during indoor practice.
* Spectators must be at least 12 feet from performers and wear

face coverings.

* Congregation: maintain social distance for each household unit; face covering should be worn during the service, even when singing.

1. Facilities

The church is working to provide adequate ventilation throughout the building.

When indoor worship resumes, we will attempt to use signage and floor markers to direct movement that allows appropriate social distancing and that tries to avoid congestion at entry and exit points.

We will advise persons attending services of the need to abide by social distancing and face covering standards.

If the Health Department or other authoritative source lets us know that someone with Covid-19 has been at a church sponsored event, we will attempt to let others who were in attendance know of the potential exposure.

We will comply with state recommendations by asking people not to attend services if they are sick or have recently been exposed to COVID-19.

1. Cleaning and Disinfecting

A general schedule will be established for cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces (handrails, doorknobs, kitchen surfaces, light switches, etc.)

Personal items generally should not be shared and should be disinfected after use. (Sharing hymnals from one service to the next is considered in the state recommendations as not posing a significant risk. Sharing the books during a service, however, would generally be limited to persons within one household unit.)

1. Communication

Staff will be advised of the precautions outlined in this plan.

1. In home services

To the extent applicable, we will abide by the standards in the state health department Guidance for Caring for People in their Homes.

1. Shared Transportation

Ride-sharing with people from different households is generally discouraged. When it occurs, face coverings while inside the vehicle are appropriate. Spacing six feet apart should be observed when practical in a larger vehicle.

1. Housing

If issues on shared temporary housing should arise, the applicable state guidelines would be applied.

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