

COVID PROTOCOLS UPDATE

January 6, 2022

As COVID infections are spiking across Ohio, including within our county and community, First Church is taking steps to maintain our worship life and programming while keeping all of us safe.

Sunday Worship and Children's Church

We will continue to offer in-person worship on Sundays. Services will continue to be livestreamed and recorded for those who wish to worship remotely. We are pausing Children's Church for the remainder of January. In order to ensure that families with children and youth can enjoy a shared worship experience together either in-person or livestreaming at home, some adjustments will be made so that the entire worship service is accessible and meaningful to all ages so. This may mean the use of Bible translations other than the NRSV, shorter sermons, interactive and participatory actions. Masked, congregational singing will continue to be permitted but the choir will take a break at least through January.

Masks

If you haven't already done so, please consider shifting to a N95 or KN95 mask. At a minimum be sure to use a multi-layered cloth masks. Better still, consider double-masking (i.e., placing your cloth mask over a surgical mask). Disposable surgical masks will continue to be available at the parking lot entrance to the church – just slip one on as you come in and then put your cloth mask over it.

Ingress/Egress

We are asking that you not linger in the hallways as you enter and leave worship. We all long for moments of fellowship, however brief, but at this time it is important to minimize in-person social interaction with those outside one's own household. This precaution extends to honoring the safety needs of our staff and their families. Please give church staff a "wide berth" when you're up at the church.

Faith Formation

Although we are pausing Children's Church, a unified Sunday school program for Children and Youth will be offered via Zoom at 11:30 a.m. As you may have read in our weekly enews *First Things First*, we had plans for restarting in-person adult education. We are pausing these plans until after January. When we are able to resume this programming it will initially be offered via Zoom with the hope that it can shift to an in-person experience when safe to do so.

2022 Budget Approval

The regular meeting of the congregation to approve the budget that typically occurs in late January will be held via Zoom, mostly likely on a weeknight. Plans are in the works for a Zoom budget education session prior to this meeting.

Fellowship

Post-worship “coffee hour” in the Fellowship Hall will be temporarily discontinued at least through January, along with other planned, indoor gatherings such as our traditional Epiphany party and Winter Family Camp. If you’ve registered and paid to attend Family Camp you will receive a full refund. While in-person fellowship is paused we will offer a weekly, post-worship Zoom fellowship time. Once you return home from worship simply tune in for some online conversation with others.

Group meetings in the church

All support groups, including 12-step groups, will continue to be able to meet in-person at the church provided room capacity and previous COVID guidelines are followed. Church committees will, however, need to resume meeting exclusively via Zoom. Other use of the church facility by church-related or community groups will be approved on a case by case basis.

Church Office

In order to protect our staff and their families we are asking that you limit in-person visits to the church office. The church building will continue to be open 9am – 4pm, Monday through Friday, but any in-person interaction with the church staff – including the Office Manager – will be by appointment only through the remainder of January.

Please know that these changes in our COVID protocols were not taken lightly and were arrived upon after much careful thought by the Reopening Task Group. It is the task group’s hope that by taking these short term measures now we will be able to move through the present spike in COVID and resume the path we were on last year towards a fuller opening of the church to in-person interaction. The task group has plans to reconvene towards the end of January to review these protocols and is also prepared to meet sooner should the pandemic worsen to the extent that we need to put additional restrictions in place.

Thank you for your understanding as we strive as a community of faith to keep one another safe, sane, and ever responsive to God’s call, particularly to the most vulnerable among us and around us. Should you have any questions or concerns about these protocols, please contact the church office.