A close up of a sign

Description automatically generated**FOREST HILLS CHURCH**

**PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for Forest Hills Church when responding to regional pandemic conditions. **Please note, this plan is subject to additional decisions made by staff and volunteers which are driven by considering recommendations of state, local, and conference authorities and tempered based on local conditions.** This document assumes that no public space can be kept germ-free, so ultimately *each individual is responsible for their own actions and decisions concerning their health and well-being.*

Forest Hills Church remains primarily focused on our mission – to make disciples. We do that by loving God and others, growing in our faith, and serving as we feel led. We believe ministry is an essential life service, however loving others includes taking reasonable precautions to protect people involved in church ministry and events.

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| ALL  Phases | * Pastoral care visit decisions are made by the pastoral leadership. * SPR to ensure sick leave policy is clear. * Staff and volunteers strongly encouraged to stay home if they are not feeling well. |
| GREEN  Phase | Business as usual  State-wide infection rate is very low or non-existent   * Use hygiene and sanitation protocols needed to minimize illness and the spread of germs.   + Handwashing signage in restrooms to continue to encourage hygiene practices. * Gathering sizes limited based on normal building and room capacity. * Offer online and virtual participation as able. * Return to normal practices for communion, weddings, funerals, name-tags, sign-up forms, lobby iPads, and food service. |
| BLUE  Phase | State-wide infection rate is low  No specific regional concern   * Increase sanitation of high-touch surfaces, including door handles, countertops, restrooms, and pews. * Children’s activity bags sanitized weekly. * Review state recommendations for gathering size limitations. If participation rate is expected to exceed guidelines, review plans to ensure distancing and alternative options for safe practices. * Worship may be indoor as desired.   + Pews may be roped off for social distancing.   + Sanctuary doors to be propped open (main & side doors)   + If more than one service is offered, plan for one-way flow.     - Separate doors for coming in and going out.   + Pew Bibles, hymnals, tissues etc may be available in the pews.     - Consider removing if more than one service is offered. * Bulletins handed out by volunteers wearing a mask and gloves. * Offer online and virtual participation as able. * Offering taken with stationary location or online – no “passing the plate”. * Consider continuing modified communion practices. * Discourage greeting or receiving line.   + If a line is to be incorporated in the event, use floor markers or similar method for social distancing.   + Discourage hugs & handshakes. * Encourage social distancing and mask (PPE) use during all events including fellowship in the lobby.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate.   + This includes no-touch “passing the peace”.   + Signage to be posted in high traffic areas. * Nursery care may be provided. Limit toys available in nursery and sanitize after use. * Name-tags, sign-up forms, and lobby iPads will not be available.   + Sign-up may be accommodated by a volunteer or online form. * Food service, including coffee shop, may be offered provided shared utensils and condiments are limited.   + Refer to and consider current state and CDC guidelines for restaurants and bars.   + Gloves and masks are to be worn by servers and food handlers.   + Condiments, including cream & sugar, are to be offered in single serving packets.   + A hand sanitizer station should be located in the near proximity.   + Seated meals require social distance planning. * External groups using church property are asked to social distance and encourage mask use.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate.   + Size limitations based on state guidelines.   + Participants requested to stay home if they have any symptoms or recent exposure.   + Group agrees to notify the church if a participant reports they have become ill.   + Church will provide sanitation supplies to wipe down surfaces of any space used. * With cooperation of Ruby’s Pantry, Community Care may continue provided safe handling practices can be implemented including social distancing and masks (PPE).   + Refer to guidelines for food pantries from the CDC. |
| YELLOW  Phase | State-wise infection rate has dropped or leveled off.  Regional concern is low.   * Increase sanitation of high-touch surfaces, including door handles, countertops, restrooms, and pews. * Children’s activity bags sanitized weekly. * Review state recommendations for gathering size limitations. If participation rate is expected to exceed guidelines, review plans to ensure distancing and alternative options for safe practices. * Outdoor worship is preferred, however worship may be indoor as desired with added precautions:   + Exterior church doors to be propped open if weather allows.   + Pews are to be roped off for social distancing.   + Sanctuary doors to be propped open. (main & side doors)   + If more than one service is offered, plan for one-way flow.     - Separate doors for coming in and going out.   + Worship leaders encouraged to incorporate brief exit instruction to closing announcements.     - Exit starting from back pews first, please maintain distance. * Bulletins handed out by volunteers wearing a mask and gloves. * Pew Bibles, hymnals, tissues etc may be available in the pews.   + Monitor guidelines for low-touch surfaces.   + Assumption based on there being one service per week with limited sharing within family unit in pew.   + Items are to be removed if more than one service is offered. * Offer online and virtual participation for worship events.   + May require advance recording with a small group. * Offering taken with stationary location or online – no “passing the plate”. * Communion practices to be modified to reduce possible community contamination.   + No common bread basket at this time.   + Worship leaders to identify best practices.   + Possible options include individually packaged elements, handing out elements after sanitizing hands or serving elements spaced out on a tray to reduce extraneous handling. * No greeting or receiving line for regular worship events.   + Exception for special life events (weddings, funerals):     - Line is only to be incorporated if requested.     - If a line is to be incorporated in the event, use floor markers or similar method for social distancing.     - Discourage hugs & handshakes.     - Encourage use of a table or other barrier type separator. * Encourage social distancing and face masks (PPE) during all events including fellowship in the lobby.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate.   + This includes no-touch “passing the peace”.   + Signage to be posted in high traffic areas. * Nursery care is not provided.   + Parents may use the room at their discretion.   + Limit toys available in nursery and sanitize after use. * Name-tags, sign-up forms, and lobby iPads will not be available.   + Sign-up may be accommodated by a volunteer or online form. * Small groups including Grow groups and ministry teams may meet in person, however virtual meeting preferred.   + Social distancing and mask (PPE) use encouraged.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate. * Food service is to be limited to special events when warranted.   + An approved plan must be documented for the event.     - The Lay Leader is the authorized approver.   + Refer to and consider current state and CDC guidelines for restaurants and bars.   + See Blue guidelines for additional minimum requirements. * Limit number of individuals in the church office based on safe social distancing due to small enclosed space. * External groups using church property are asked to social distance and encourage mask use.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate.   + Size limitations based on state guidelines.   + Participants requested to stay home if they have any symptoms or recent exposure.   + Group agrees to notify the church if a participant reports they have become ill.   + Church will provide sanitation supplies to wipe down surfaces of any space used. * With cooperation of Ruby’s Pantry, Community Care may continue provided safe handling practices can be implemented including social distancing and masks (PPE).   + Refer to guidelines for food pantries from the CDC. |
| ORANGE  Phase | Infection rate considered high or rising.  People encouraged to minimize non-essential trips and visits.   * Increase sanitation of offices and classrooms in use and high-touch surfaces, including door handles, countertops, restrooms, and pews. * Worship services to be offered outdoors, drive-in, or online.   + May require advance recording with a small group.   + Bulletins and other handouts distributed by volunteers wearing gloves and face masks. (low touch).   + Offering taken with stationary location or online – no “passing the plate”.   + The church building may be open on Sunday mornings for limited participants to play the online service, however this is neither advertised or encouraged. We recognize there are those who have a spiritual need or technical limitations requiring in-person participation. * Communion practices to be modified based on a virtual or outdoor environment.   + No common bread basket at this time.   + Worship leaders to identify best practices.   + Possible options include individually packaged elements, handing out elements after sanitizing hands or serving elements spaced out on a tray to reduce extraneous handling. * Refer to state guidelines for funerals and weddings.   + No food service or onsite reception at this time. * Encourage social distancing and face masks (PPE) during all in-person events, including outside.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate.   + This includes no-touch “passing the peace”.   + Signage to be posted in high traffic areas. * Nursery care is not provided. * Due to outdoor or virtual worship, Name-tags, sign-up forms, and lobby iPads will not be available. * Small groups including Grow groups and ministry teams meet virtually when possible.   + In-person meetings allowed, but not preferred, provided the state guideline for participants is observed.   + Social distancing and mask (PPE) use encouraged.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate. * In-person Wednesday night activities and youth group are suspended. * Food service is not offered. * Limit number of individuals in the church office based on safe social distancing due to small enclosed space. * External groups using church property are asked to social distance and encourage mask use.   + Mask use is required when mandated by government authorities, with exceptions for preaching and Sanctify musicians, along with other exceptions as stated in the mandate.   + Size limitations based on state guidelines.   + Participants requested to stay home if they have any symptoms or recent exposure.   + Group agrees to notify the church if a participant reports they have become ill.   + Church will provide sanitation supplies to wipe down surfaces of any space used. * With cooperation of Ruby’s Pantry, Community Care may continue provided safe handling practices can be implemented including social distancing and masks (PPE).   + Refer to guidelines for food pantries from the CDC. |
| RED  Phase | Infection rate considered high.  People encouraged to shelter-in-place with only essential business permitted.   * As an essential business the church building remains open, however no on-site events are scheduled with the exception of Community Care.   + With cooperation of Ruby’s Pantry, Community Care may continue provided safe handling practices can be implemented including social distancing and masks (PPE).   + Refer to guidelines for food pantries from the CDC. * Increase sanitation of office space and classrooms in use and high-touch surfaces, including door handles, countertops, restrooms, and pews. * Worship services to be offered online only.   + May require advance recording with a small group.   + Offering taken online, mail-in, or drop-off.   + The church building may be open on Sunday mornings for limited participants to play the online service, however this is neither advertised or encouraged. We recognize there are those who have a spiritual need or technical limitations requiring in-person participation. * Communion practices to be modified based on a virtual environment.   + Worship leaders to identify best practices. * Refer to state guidelines for funerals and weddings.   + No food service or onsite reception at this time. * Small groups including Grow groups and ministry teams meet virtually.   + May require advance recording with a small group for sharing video message. * In-person Wednesday night activities and youth group are suspended. * Limit number of individuals in the church office based on safe social distancing due to small enclosed space. * No external groups using church property at this time. |

Progression from one phase to another will occur based on a review of the change in guidance and data from state, local, and conference authorities. Changing phases requires the approval of the Lay Leader , who receives advise from staff and other key leaders.

**Communication Planning**

* A change in phase will be communicated via email to all staff, AMT, CMMT, and other key ministry leaders.
  + Current phase, with key details will be posted on the church website.
* Communication is needed to inform the congregation of all worship options, procedures, and requirements.
  + Use social media and email for main communication.
    - Limited phone calls may be needed.
  + Encourage members to stay home if they feel unsure or if they are sick.
  + Create a communication plan for staff and families for self-reporting of symptoms and notification of exposures and closures.
    - Due to privacy concerns, the name of the sick person is not required, and should not be requested. If known, the name is not be shared.
* Outside groups are required to notify the church if any participant tests positive.
  + Due to privacy concerns, the name of the sick person is not required, and should not be requested. If known, the name is not be shared.
* Report to local health officials if someone tested positive who has been in the building
  + Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
    - Due to privacy concerns, the name of the sick person is not required, and should not be requested. If known, the name is not be shared.
  + Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use the area until it after cleaning and disinfection; wait 24 hours to clean and disinfect to reduce risk to individuals cleaning. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.
  + Advise sick staff and congregants not to return to the facility until they have met CDC’s criteria to discontinue home isolation.

Additional reference

* <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/regatheringplan>
* <https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp>
* <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>