



**CONSEIL RÉGIONAL
DE L'OUTAOUAIS ET DE L'EST DE L'ONTARIO
EASTERN ONTARIO OUTAOUAIS
REGIONAL COUNCIL**

June 15, 2020

“Safely Reopening our Churches”: A Letter to Our Communities of Faith

We have all been living through an unprecedented time over these past few months as we live with the reality of COVID-19. We are aware of the struggles – both financial and emotional – that individuals are experiencing, and our Communities of Faith are no exception. People are longing for things to return to “normal”, but whatever that is in the future is yet to be seen. We have all worked hard to “flatten the curve” but we still need to be vigilant.

As you are aware, the Ontario Government has announced the introduction of Phase 2 which allows churches to begin reopening as of Friday, June 12, 2020, yet with some very specific rules. According to the government’s news release, “*all places of worship are permitted to open with physical distancing in place and a maximum of 30% of capacity*”. We encourage you to consider that 30% capacity of your building may be more people than you can safely accommodate with physical distancing. It may be helpful to take the time to do some actual measurements of your space measuring six feet in all directions from where a worshipper would be sitting.

As your Community of Faith considers its next move, we hope that careful consideration will be given to all aspect of what is necessary for a safe reopening of our church buildings.

As your governing bodies begin the conversation regarding re-opening, we would remind you that there is no requirement to begin having in-church worship services. Many Communities of Faith have decided to play it safe and delay any in-person worship services until September or even later. When considering reopening our churches we also need to remember that we are also called to ensure that our buildings are a safe place. While the decision lies with each local governing body, **the Executive of the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council is recommending that churches not reopen until it is safer to do so. The motion is reprinted at the end of this document.**

If your Community of Faith is considering reopening, be aware that there is much more to be considered than just when the first service will be held. Because of this the EOORC Executive is asking each community of faith to **do a risk assessment and create a written plan** which outlines in detail the steps that will be taken to prepare for a reopening, as well as ongoing steps that will be taken to ensure that the physical building and its contents remain clean. This is a local responsibility that will differ, based upon the size and frequency of use of the building. The EOORC Exec is requesting that this written plan for reopening be sent to the Regional Council (wstrong@united-church.ca) for review before any local action is taken.

It is also the recommendation of the EOORC Executive that each Community of Faith contact their local health unit to ask their advice on reopening. As you consider reopening your church building, please consider how you might handle the following which is by no means an complete list of things to ponder: entry and exit, seating people in the pews, no singing/choirs, use of washrooms, use of PPE/masks, no handshaking or hugs, sign-in sheets in case of local outbreaks (do not share pens), removal of hymnbooks from pews, no reuse of printed resources, the arrival of unexpected visitors, increased frequency of cleaning/disinfecting. We have included in the resources listed below a document created by the City of Toronto that has a very detailed list of things to consider.

As you consider reopening, remember that this does not just affect the members of the congregation, but also your ministry personnel who may have health conditions that weaken their immune system, or have immunocompromised members of their family. It is important that you work with your minister(s) to accommodate their concerns for their and their family's health, as part of our focus in all of our pandemic planning on the health of our staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve. The safety of staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve must be the core value at the center of our decisions about reopening for in-person activities.

The government has also suggested the possibility of outside/parking lot services, but the same health and safety measures must be applied when gathering groups of people.

According to the Government of Ontario, all places of worship **must** adhere to the following requirements:

- Participation of no more than 30% of the capacity of your premises.
- Maintaining a distance of two metres/six feet between all persons as much as possible.
- Encouraging the use of masks, and requiring that masks be worn if, in rare circumstances, physical distancing is not possible.
- Limiting singing and loud speaking.

- Avoiding opportunities for the virus to spread through touch, either directly or indirectly through surfaces and objects, including objects that may be used in rituals or ceremonies.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection.

For our Communities of Faith in Quebec, please refer to this resource that was developed by our neighbouring Nakanha:ka Regional Council:

- <https://nakhakaucc.ca/blog/2020/05/30/process-for-gradual-re-opening-of-church-buildings-peter-bisset/>

As your Community of Faith considers whether to reopen or to remain closed for the time being, please be in touch with Rev. Whit Strong (wstrong@united-church.ca) if you have any questions or concerns.

While we may feel that church worship services are essential, please remember that our church members are not expendable! Let's not look for loopholes.

Here are a number of resources available that will help you make decisions regarding reopening.

United Church resources:

- www.shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/emergency-plan
- <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/safety-considerations-reopening-during-pandemic>
- <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/why-reopening-a-church-is-different/>

Government resources:

- <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/978e-COVID-19-Guidance-for-Places-of-Worship.pdf> (an excellent resource)
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

- <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>
- https://d1ow5xpphy0w2p.cloudfront.net/common/covid-19-worship-places-health-and-safety-guidance.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0EdUJ5r3af12Bgnrpl_dIq81Qrdw_EH9FeJ6dt8xCmuc4uHasg73x40xA
- https://healthunit.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19_Cleaning_Disinfecting_Bathrooms_Used_by_Public.pdf
- <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>
- <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-relaunch-guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>

United-in-Learning:

- <https://www.united-in-learning.com/index.php/webinars/recordings/348-congregational-programming-more-opening-our-buildings-june-4-2020>
(recommended viewing)

We also recommend checking out the resource that Living Skies Regional Council developed as a discernment process for developing a reopening plan.

- <https://livingskiesrc.ca/re-opening-buildings-discernment-and-planning-resources/>

General COVID-19 factsheet:

https://healthunit.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19_Precautio_n_Poster.pdf

Handwashing:

https://healthunit.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19_Handwash_Poster.pdf

Face Coverings:

https://healthunit.org/wp-content/uploads/How_To_Safely_Wear_a_Face_Covering.pdf

Training

Staff and volunteers should use a mask/face covering at all times while providing services. Instruct staff and volunteers on proper hand hygiene techniques and respiratory etiquette; when to use masks, [proper use of mask](#), and how to clean or discard single use masks appropriately.

Print and Post Signs

- [COVID-19 health assessment](#) sign should be posted at all entrances.
 - Anyone with [COVID-19 symptoms](#), or who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 is not permitted to enter.
 - [Handwashing](#) and [respiratory etiquette](#) signs should be posted in high visibility areas.
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Motion passed by the EOORC Executive on June 11, 2020

2020-06-11_068 MOTION (L Stronski/L. Suddaby) that the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council Executive;

- a) strongly recommend that no churches reopen for public worship before Labour Day weekend;
- b) expects that every Community of Faith prepare guidelines for reopening and submit their plan to the Regional Council (wstrong@united-church.ca), two weeks prior to their proposed opening date;
- c) agrees to post and circulate the information and resources pertaining to safely reopening Communities of Faith;
- d) strongly encourage Communities of faith to be in touch with their local health units;
- e) expects that every Community of Faith create a separate plan with guidelines for reopening building to rentals and community activities or Community groups; and
- f) continue to provide information, as developments require.