

## **Palmerston CRC – Proposed Protocols for Reopening Public Worship**

**Limiting Attendance:** Worshipers will be permitted to return to in-person worship services beginning Sunday, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 while at the same time being encouraged to worship from home using our live-streaming capabilities. We will especially encourage those who are at a higher risk of becoming infected with the COVID-19 virus or developing serious symptoms from it to remain at home. Also, we will ensure that our membership understands that there is no childcare or children's ministries at this time. We will be limiting the number of worshipers in the sanctuary to 80 in total in order to be in compliance with the 30% of capacity guideline.

**Worshiper Registration:** Those wishing to join our in-person services will be asked to register online. Some spaces will be reserved in advance for the pastor, ushers, a/v team, and, potentially, for walk-ups. The registration process will include making potential worshipers aware of the screening questions that will be asked of them upon entering the facility on Sunday mornings. It will also announce to registrants that they are encouraged to take their own temperature at home before coming to church on Sunday morning to see if they may have a fever. Those who are unable to use the internet but who still wish to register for services will be asked to contact our church secretary, who is also the person that any questions about registration will be directed to. At 3:00 pm on Fridays, service registration will be closed and our church secretary will print off the list of registrants and leave it for the team of ushers to use. In the event that more than 80 people register for our morning service that service will be declared to be closed to further registration. Those wishing to join our services will be encouraged to do electronically via livestreaming. If many more than 80 people indicate that they desire to join us in an in-person worship service the elders will be informed and they will consider opening a second service.

**Screening Worshipers:** Those arriving for worship will be screened and seated by a team of ushers comprised of members who currently make up our team of ushers plus several more members. There will be a “greeter” at entrance which faces the road. A table with hand sanitizer and disposable masks/face coverings (to be provided by the committee of stewards) will be at this entrance. The entrance doors will be propped open in order to minimize the touching of doors. The greeter will ask each potential worshiper the following questions:

- Are you feeling well today?
- Do you have any COVID-19 symptoms?
- Have you come into close contact with a person with symptoms of COVID-19 or with a confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 14 days?
- Have you travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes”, the potential worshiper will be asked to not enter the building. Otherwise, the potential worshiper will be invited to enter the building. In addition to the greeter there will be a person who is checking the names of those wishing to enter the building with a printed list of those who have registered. There will also be two ushers who will be directing worshipers to their seats.

**Facility Access:** Worshipers will enter the facility exclusively from the front entrance which

faces the road and exit exclusively from the rear entrance which faces the parking lot. The committee of stewards will put up signage in the church facility indicating where people should be and also mark areas of the church where it is not necessary for people to be. This will be done at the committee of stewards' discretion.

**Seating:** The number of chairs in the sanctuary will be reduced and the worship committee will place signage indicating the areas in which people should or should not be seated in order to promote social distancing. Those remaining will be placed in a configuration that is consistent with social distancing. Ushers will seat people at the beginning of the service and also release people at the end of the service.

**Wearing of Masks/Face Coverings:** According to the guidelines published by the Ontario government, the requirement for persons to wear face coverings in commercial establishments does not apply to faith settings. Hence we will not be requiring worshipers to wear masks/face coverings during worship. However the wearing of masks/face coverings will be strongly recommended. The congregation will be encouraged to bring their own masks. Our pastor and worship team will be encouraged to wear a mask before and after they are leading worship; during worship wearing a mask will be at their discretion.

**Suspension of Congregational Singing:** Congregational singing in our services will be officially suspended as per the advice of the Public Health Unit for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. This means that while any praise team members may sing, we will be *instructing* our congregation not to sing. Liturgically, opportunities to sing will be minimized while alternatives (such as responsive readings and prayers) will be used instead. The worship committee will acquire plexiglas shields to separate worship leaders from the congregation in order to comply with the guidance for places of worship from the Public Health Unit for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. Once worshipers are outdoors, we will make it a practice to sing the doxology "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow" at our cars before driving away as led by the pastor.

**Suspension of Fellowship:** Worshipers are to practice social distancing as much as possible before, during, and after worship. Activities such as shaking hands or hugging other worshipers are officially discouraged. There will be no beverages or food items served before, during, or after worship.

**Worshiper Hygiene:** Worshipers will be encouraged to use the sanitation stations that have already been installed at the church facility. Worshipers will be discouraged from using the washroom at the church facility; however, in the event of an emergency, they will be directed to use the family washroom. Worshipers will also be encouraged to bring their own bibles and/or have a bible app installed on their cellphones as all bibles and hymnals will be removed from the sanctuary.

**Cleaning and disinfecting:** Our custodian will work together with the committee of stewards

to generate and implement a cleaning and disinfecting protocol for the church facility that is in accordance with the guidelines from the Ontario Ministry of Health. According to the latest communication at the time of writing, this will mean that frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Additionally, our custodian and committee of stewards will take steps to ensure that the water systems of our church facility are safe after a prolonged period of shutdown and that the building will be appropriately ventilated.

**Offerings:** Deacons will not pass around plates or baskets; worshipers will be encouraged to place their offerings in sealed envelopes and drop them off in the green bin which we have been using for drive-through offerings. Deacons will continue with drive-through offerings for those worshipping at home at their discretion.

(Last updated: August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

### **Sample Opening Pastor's Welcome**

Good Morning! And welcome back to Palmerston Christian Reformed Church. It has been a long time since I have seen many of you. And I am very excited to be leading you in worship today!

Before we begin there are a few things that I want to mention. Things have changed drastically since our last public worship service in March. We have become a socially distant society due to the risks that are associated with the COVID-19 virus. It's hard to know precisely how risky it is to gather together like we are doing now! However our leadership has decided that gathering together to worship is worth the risk, especially when we do our due diligence to protect one another.

To that end, you are encouraged to remain socially distant from one another before, during, and after worship – although I realize that this is going to be counter-intuitive. We are, after all, a family of faith. And yet at the moment we are in a variety of social “bubbles”. So please, if at all possible, try to keep at least 2 meters apart from people who are not in your social “bubble”. Things like handshakes and hugs, which normally we would encourage, are now discouraged.

All children's ministries and nursery are suspended at this time. So if you have children with you, please keep them with you!

Also, while masks or face-coverings are not mandatory for entering this building, we strongly encourage you to wear them. I myself will be wearing a face mask when I am not preaching or speaking publicly as I am right now.

Furthermore, please note that congregational singing is officially suspended for now due to the guidelines that we have been given from our regional Public Health Unit. So while music will still absolutely be part of this service – and while members of our praise time might sing – you are requested to sing along in your minds or contemplate the words that are being sung by the praise team. Again, this is counter-intuitive and we normally would encourage you to sing!

Yet these are unusual times and we do wish to take seriously the advice that has been given to us in order to reduce the risk of transmitting any viruses.

Let me tell you now what will be the same in our services as before. We have the same commitment to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ that we always have. We have the same love for God and for one another, and the same confidence in the scriptures, and the same desire to live by the Spirit. We have the same great commission that the historic church has always had to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them to obey what Christ has commanded. These things are unchanged. And we will continue to do these as long as we live or until Christ returns.