

Frequently Asked Questions About Safely Worshiping Together Again

When will we be back to “normal?”

Honestly, there is not an easy answer to this question. Information is constantly evolving as we learn more about the virus and best practices are rapidly changing. There is no magic date on the calendar when we know local numbers will be low enough to re-open the campus, when it will be safe to hold Sunday school again and when we will sing “safely” together as a congregation, etc. We will continue to monitor the situation and gradually and carefully add pieces back to what is familiar to us all. Please offer grace and patience to the church leadership as we all work together to make the best decisions for the community of St. John’s.

We can shop in certain stores but why can we not come to church? Should we not be allowed to worship in person if we can shop?

The risk of infection = time + viral load. The church is an area where we sit together for long periods of time and do things that put lots of viral particles in the air (higher dose). Shopping involves continuous movement (around different people) over much less time - so the risk of infection is much less. When there is evidence of spread within our community, it’s wise for us to be good stewards and limit our services. Remember that “positive” case counts are delayed reporting on what was happening 2-3 weeks ago, not the number of current cases. Please keep in mind that our goal is to keep our members and visitors healthy and safe. Our focus is *being* the church, not just on having church on campus. This is a temporary situation, even though some days it is difficult to remain patient.

Why are we being asked to wear masks?

Wearing masks may help to reduce the spread of the virus. Putting the safety and the needs of others before our own comfort is serving and loving our neighbors in tangible and necessary ways. Christ calls us all to care for the weak, the poor, and the vulnerable, and our first rule as Methodists is “Do no harm.”.

Are children capable of wearing masks?

Yes. Children are resilient and adapt to changes easier than we may think. It will likely take some practice and some education, but even young children are able to handle masks. Try including your children in the design of the mask, or making them for stuffed animals or dolls. Take time to explain why masks help ourselves and others. Don’t panic if your child doesn’t handle a mask correctly all of the time. Keep working on it. Children don’t wash their hands correctly all of the time either, but we still teach and encourage good habits.

If the number of people on elevators and in bathrooms is limited, will I be able to share with my spouse/family?

Yes. As long as you live in the same household, you will be able to ride the elevator, go into the restroom, and sit together in the service as a family unit.

When we reach the phase that adult Sunday school classes can meet in person, will all classes be allowed to meet or will classes with high-risk membership be asked to wait longer?

All Sunday school classes will resume at the same time.

Why can I go to a Worship Service, but Sunday School is not allowed to meet yet?

We will introduce in-person worship before Sunday school. This is due to the need to limit multiple contacts between groups of people and to manage proper sanitation, cleaning, and social distancing guidelines.

Other churches in Rock Hill are beginning in-person worship again. Why is St. John's taking longer? The Bishop said we could return to in-person worship on June 14th, why are we not following the Bishop's directive?

Every church is unique and must consider their worship attendance, membership demographics, physical campus, space restrictions, and limitations, local virus statistics, advice from scientists and doctors, etc. There is not a "one size fits all" plan for churches. Bishop Holston's plan allows for consideration of these kinds of differences.

Will we be allowed some outdoor programming in Phase 2 (and later phases)?

Yes! Phase 2 will allow for socially distanced outdoor activities (weather permitting).

Why is singing not recommended?

Singers are at high risk for transmission for COVID-19, because of the number of aerosols they have the potential to generate. This poses an extremely difficult problem in regards to group rehearsals and congregational singing as singing has the potential to be a "super spreading" event.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cited a choral practice in Skagit County, Wash., on March 10 as an example of how the virus could spread quickly among singers. One member who showed symptoms of COVID-19, and later tested positive, attended the 2½-hour practice along with 60 other choir members. Within a week, there were 32 confirmed cases and 20 probable cases of COVID-19; three patients were hospitalized and two died. The CDC noted that in a "super spreading" event such as this, "transmission was likely facilitated by close proximity (within 6 feet) during practice and augmented by the act of singing." As a result, singers likely fall into a CDC classification known as "super

emitters” because they release more aerosol particles when singing, second only to that of sneezing and/or coughing.

I am dealing with a lot of grief and frustration right now. Is there someone who can help me process the difficulty that I am experiencing?

All of us have experienced loss and all of us are grieving in different ways. We will not come back to life exactly as we knew it before. While we recognize that there is potential for positive change as a result of the pandemic, we also recognize that much has been lost. You can contact one of our pastors or we have a team of trained volunteers through our **Stephen Ministry** that can help you process those feelings and emotions. If you are in need of someone to talk to, please contact Ida Newsom at idabet@comporium.net.

How will social distancing be achieved in the seating of the Sanctuary?

Family units will be allowed to sit together 6 feet apart from the next family unit. Every other pew will be skipped and seating will be staggered on each pew, to avoid your back being directly in front of another person. Seating will be done “back to front” and departure will be in reverse order by an usher.

Will On-line streaming still be offered after we return to in-person worship?

Yes! We will continue to stream on Facebook Live. The service will then be uploaded to YouTube and a link to the Worship service can be found here: <http://stjohnsrh.org/event-registration/worship-services-bulletins/> after the upload is complete. We will continue to broadcast on CN2 (it is delayed one week) as well. We are continuously making improvements as we learn more about how to stream our services well.

Will we have Communion again? If we do, will we do it differently?

We will, but not until later phases. Prior to beginning communion again, additional details about what to expect will be communicated.

Will it be ok to have my children/infant in worship when we go back to in-person worship if nursery/children’s church is not provided?

Yes! We are a church family who worships together, from our youngest to our most senior members. We welcome ALL little ones and infants into the church at all times, but especially during this time when the nursery and children’s church are not provided. Children’s bulletins, color pages, and disposable crayons for children to enjoy during the service and take home with them at the end of Worship will be provided. Wiggles, giggles, and chatter are expected and should not be cause for worry for parents.

What kinds of changes to worship can I expect, especially at first?

As we begin to reopen and reintroduce “in-person” worship, there are many adaptations to take note of:

- Entry and Exit points will be designated for worshippers upon arrival. Please follow directional signage and prompts from greeters/ushers.
- All doors will be propped open that will be in use.
- Enter the worship areas while maintaining physical spacing as directed by ushers/greeters.
- Seating will be done “back to front” with departure being in reverse order.
- Families may sit together (household units). All others will remain at least 6 - feet apart.
- No food or beverages will be permitted (with exception to nursing infants, pregnant women, or those who require water for health reasons. Please be sure you have a lid on your water. Drinking fountains will be closed, so please bring your water from home).
- Hand sanitizer will be available at both entrances to the Church.
- Masks will be worn indoors.
- All materials in pews (hymnals, bibles, pew pads, etc...) will be removed, sanitized, and stored.
- Bulletins will contain all information pertaining to worship.
- Offering collection plates will be available at the doors upon exiting.
- Online giving will continue as normal
- In lieu of pew pads, a [link](#) to a Google form will be provided - using your personal devices to complete the form.
- The “Passing of the Peace” will be suspended until it is safe to resume.
- Hymns and sung congregational responses will not be sung and the choir will not be seated in the loft.
- Certain restrooms will be designated for limited use.
- Nursery care will not be provided until later phases.

At the conclusion of the services, the congregation is asked to participate in the following:

- No handshakes/hugs/physical contact with congregational members and clergy.

All of these changes are likely to feel contrary to the sense of community that we have all worked to build. We are sad about that but will prioritize safety as long as it is necessary. Additional details may be released as we approach in-person worship services.

How many services will be offered?

To begin with, we will have one service that will incorporate aspects of both contemporary and traditional worship services. There is a great deal of planning that is going into our in-person worship plan. Due to the need to operate under such unusual circumstances,

we would like at least a week or two with one service to work out any kinks that arise. We will add additional seating and services as needed.

Is it possible that information in the safe worship plan may change?

Yes, it is *likely* that it will. We are doing our best to provide accurate and helpful information to the congregation in a constantly changing environment. Recommendations, new scientific research, best practice, and the experiences of other faith communities may provide information that we will want to incorporate into our safe worship plan. It is also possible that we will need to move back and forth between phases if local numbers change significantly enough to merit taking a step backward. We have tried to think through a wide variety of programming and worship scenarios and situations as we have continued our planning. However, it is impossible to envision every possible consideration that may arise and it is possible that minor exceptions will have to be made on a case by case basis. Please extend grace to one another and to the leadership of the church as we navigate through uncharted waters.

Where can I look for local COVID-19 data?

<https://covidtracking.com/data>

https://covidactnow.org/us/sc/county/york_county/?s=39636

Where do I direct my questions?

Please call the church office at 803-327-3113 or follow this [LINK](#) to submit a question. Questions may be updated on this document and shared so others may benefit from them.