

## REGATHERING PLAN

On recommendation of the Regathering Task Force, Council has adopted the following guidance for regathering for in-person worship and other activities in our church building. The guidance is based on the need to prioritize the health of the most vulnerable in our community coupled with the very real needs we each have to be in community with each other. We desire for everyone to feel welcome and comfortable when they re-enter the sanctuary for in-person worship. This guidance is consistent with DC and CDC guidelines, and we will continue to operate within those guidelines. The church guidance may be updated as warranted, based on changed scientific understandings and circumstances.

### Some general guidance

- Metrics are considered the minimum requirement for entering a phase. Once we decide to enter a phase, we will continue monitoring cases but will only fall back if we see evidence of a sustained increase in new cases. As we've observed metrics over the last six months, we have seen that some fluctuation is normal and does not necessarily reflect an impending spike. Sustained increases over several days and in the majority of our regions could indicate increased community spread and may cause us to fall back to the previous phase.
- The Regathering Task Force and Staff will make decisions relating to phasing jointly.
- We will spend at least 4 weeks at each phase before moving to the next no matter how quickly COVID metrics drop during that time. The incubation period of COVID means that there is always a lag between actual increased transmission and when that increased transmission shows up in the numbers.
- If someone who has attended our service tests positive, we will cease all meeting in person for at least 2 weeks, contact all who attended the service, and encourage all to self-quarantine for 14 days. This will be a pause in our meeting, not a fallback to a previous phase.
- As our congregation pulls from 3 states and several counties, we will apply the metric from the "worst off" of DC, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Fairfax County, Arlington County, and Alexandria when deciding when it's time to move into a new phase.
- To facilitate contact tracing, we will require attendants to sign-up, and we will take attendance during services. We will provide a sign-in sheet for visitors that will include a health screening form..
- As our virtual congregation has grown to include those outside our area, we feel it's critical to continue streaming and to structure worship services in a way that meets the needs of those worshipping in-person and those worshipping virtually.
- While we will not require proof of vaccination for attending in-person worship, we strongly recommend each member of our community become vaccinated when able and encourage family and friends to also be vaccinated. It is only through widespread vaccination that we will reach herd immunity and be able to gather again for worship without mitigation strategies.
- We will develop a list of FAQs that will be updated and made available to all.  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VTdqfW0J5E7EqRg4ymO1XYtpjaZSnMhrF27pY-QjQzI/edit?usp=sharing>
- We are committed to prioritizing the health and well-being of all, and make recommendations based on this. In words provided by SING, we need to "err on the side of caution not because we are fearful but because we are faithful."

## PHASES OF PHYSICAL REGATHERING

| Phase | Metrics                               | Who   | Safety Protocols   | Singing  | Other Worship Items  | Children  | Fellowship         |
|-------|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|---|--------------------|
| 0     |                                       | No one in sanctuary   |  |  |  |   |                    |
| 1     | 20 cases per 100,000                  | Staff streams from sanctuary  | All masked unless speaking; remain 6 feet apart; temperatures taken upon arrival   | No singing   |  |   | No gatherings      |
| 2     | 14 cases per 100,000                  | Liturgists, readers, and instrumentalists (strings and percussion) invited; no more than 10 people in the sanctuary space to include AV folks | All masked unless speaking; remain 6 feet apart; Participants complete self-assessment before traveling to the building; no sharing of elevator outside of household groups. | No singing   | Individual, pre-packaged communion can be made available. No gathering after service | No in-person Sunday School or childcare; if a child is assisting with the service, one adult will need to attend with that child. | Outside and masked |
| 3     | 50% vaccination; 10 cases per 100,000 | Small groups invited; no more than 25 worshippers plus up to 10 worship leaders/AV folk/ushers  | All masked unless speaking; remain 6 feet apart; participants complete self-assessment before traveling to the building; no sharing of elevator outside of household groups. | Carefully selected quartets may rehearse and record for use during the service. Must remain masked and distanced during rehearsal but may be unmasked while recording. | Individual, pre-packaged communion can be made available. No gathering after service | No in-person Sunday School or childcare; if a child is assisting with the service, one adult will need to attend with that child. | Outside and masked |

|   |                                      |  |  |  |  |  |   |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| 4 | 70% vaccination; 3 cases per 100,000 | Up to 50 worshippers plus up to 10 worship leaders/AV folk/ushers; sign-ups required | All masked unless speaking; remain 6 feet apart; participants complete self-assessment before traveling to the building; no sharing of elevator outside household groups | Small groups (up to 4) of masked singers allowed during service. | Individual, pre-packaged communion can be made available. No gathering after service | No in-person Sunday School or childcare when we enter this phase. As metrics improve and vaccination becomes available for all, we anticipate slowly providing these options | Small gatherings allowed inside with masking and distancing; Preference for outside, masked gatherings. |
| 5 |                                      | All are welcome  | No COVID-specific protocols  | Congregational singing and communion                             |  |  | Resume coffee hour  |

### Phase 0

In this phase, everything is virtual. There may be filming of individual pieces of the worship service that may take place during the week in the sanctuary, but these will be limited to three individuals. Until the pandemic has ended, we must always be prepared to go back to this phase whenever we appear to be entering another spike.

### Phase 1

When case rates in our immediate area fall to 20 cases per 100,000, staff will be allowed back to stream live on Sunday mornings. No staff member will be required to come into the sanctuary during this phase. All people involved in streaming the service will remain masked unless speaking/leading worship. To the extent possible, individuals will have assigned mics, and where not possible, the lecterns and mics will be sanitized between uses. There is to be no singing or guest musicians during the service, though pieces can be pre-recorded to be used during the service.

### Phase 2

When case rates in our immediate area fall to 14 cases per 100,000, liturgists, Scripture readers, and string and percussion instrumentalists will be invited to participate in streaming from the sanctuary. The total number of people in the sanctuary, to include AV folks, will remain at or below 10. All will remain masked and at least 6 feet apart (except during their portion of leading the service), but household groups can sit together. To the extent possible, individuals will have assigned mics, and where not possible, the lecterns and mics will be sanitized between uses. There will be no singing during the service, though pieces can be pre-recorded for use during the service.

Outside gatherings can resume. All participants must be masked and remain 6 feet apart.

### **Phase 3**

When the vaccination rates in our immediate area all reach at least 50% and the case rates fall to 10 cases per 100,000, we will invite small groups to attend worship in the sanctuary. In addition, we will try to have at least one member of the Regathering TF attend each Sunday in Phase 3 to assess how well the protocols are working and to collect surveys. Total persons in the sanctuary will be limited to 25 plus no more than 10 AV/ushers/worship leaders. Protocol from Phase 2 will remain in effect. The purpose of this phase is to allow staff, Worship Commission, and Outreach and Membership to experiment with different protocols and ways of structuring worship in preparation for Phase 4. We will use this time to work out attendance-taking systems to facilitate contact tracing and systems for welcoming visitors while ensuring protocols are followed. Therefore, protocols will be the same for Phases 3 and 4.

We will need to provide Byron with 2 weeks' notice so that he can move equipment and work with Table Church to store their streaming equipment. Chairs will be set up in the Sanctuary with physical distancing in mind. We recommend that ushers seat larger household groups in the pews.

We will need to provide guidance on entering and exiting the church including use of elevators and stairs and areas of the building considered "off-limits." There will be a table placed in the entryway of the sanctuary to hold printed bulletins, communion elements, and any other items needed by worshippers. A smaller table will be placed by the door to the sanctuary closest to the elevator. We will include a printed reminder of protocols in the bulletin and on the screen prior to the beginning of service similar to what we anticipate using during Phase 4. All protocols will be provided as part of the online sign-up process, and attendees will be expected to agree to the protocols and complete a short health screening as part of signing up.

A 3-person usher team will be used each Sunday during Phase 3. Depending on feedback from the ushers, we may move to a 4-person usher team in Phase 4. We will aim to schedule the same team two weeks in a row so that we can solicit specific feedback from the ushers. Outreach and Membership will work to develop a list of usher teams that can be scheduled during this Phase and the beginning of Phase 4 and a detailed set of instructions for ushers during these phases. Specific guidelines for ushers:

- One usher will be located by the elevator to take attendance, provide health screening and masks to those who need it, and to help direct people coming up the elevator or stairs to seats
- One usher will be located at the front door to take attendance, direct visitors to the health screening table, and help seat people who come through the front door
- One usher will be located at the health screening table to provide a health screening form for visitors, collect sign-in data for visitors, and provide masks to those who need them
- All ushers will help direct people to exit in household groups when the service ends
- We will re-engage with Pathways to Housing towards the end of this phase to help smooth the transition to Phase 4

A set-up checklist will be developed to help facilitate ease of following safety protocols.. It will include at least the following:

- One way in/one way out signs on the doors
- Guidance for how to use the elevator safely
- Hand sanitizer available at both entrances to the sanctuary
- Masks made available at the door for any who forget to bring a mask
- A sign in sheet and health screening form for visitors
- Chairs placed in physically distanced groupings
- Announcement at the beginning of service reminding individuals to keep masks on at all time, to remain in their seats at the end of service until invited to exit, and to refrain from singing
- Parking validator placed on the corner of the security desk with sanitizing wipes

The Regathering TF will provide a written survey and conduct virtual focus groups to elicit feedback from the attendees. The written survey will be given to attendees as they enter the building (possibly included in the bulletin) to fill out as something strikes them. There will be a basket placed by the exit door to collect completed surveys.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UpK7anUNuVMp3oBP5O4wPPc35XGhIMd26Kd5AF7A1eI/edit?usp=sharing>

During this phase, John Horman may work with carefully selected quartets on rehearsing and recording pieces to be used during service. All participants must remain masked and distanced during the rehearsal but may unmask for the actual recording. These sessions will be less than 1 hour, and there must be at least 1 hour between groups in the sanctuary.

We encourage small groups of church members to find ways to gather outside and masked for fellowship during this phase. Recommendations include gathering at a park or other public venue or small groups meeting in someone's backyard.

## **Phase 4**

When the vaccination rates in our immediate area reach at least 70%, and the case rates fall to at least 3 cases per 100,000, we will allow up to 50 attendees per worship service + 10 ushers/AV/worship leaders. We will divide the congregation into groups and assign each group a Sunday (i.e. group A will attend the first and third Sundays of each month) followed by sign-ups. One can only sign up for their assigned Sunday. The sign up both facilitates attendance taking and allows us to shift groups over time if needed. The Christian Education Commission will reach out to families with children individually to determine if the family will be attending all together or if there will be some dividing of the household for worship attendance during the portion of this phase when there is no in-person childcare or Sunday School. We will survey all members of our community at least 2 weeks prior to entering Phase 4 to determine who would be interested in attending in-person. As we move through Phase 4, people will be encouraged to continue to sign up to be included on the in-person worship list.

The weekly sign-up form will include a reminder of the COVID protocols in place and a brief health screening (example: <https://forms.gle/aXszdk9GghgzfMgv7>). It will be sent each week to the individuals on that week's list. Members will be expected to complete a sign up sheet for their entire household NLT 10am Friday morning. The form will list each member of that household who will be attending on a given Sunday. For special event services (Homecoming, Christmas Eve, Easter, etc.) we recommend the Worship Commission look into the feasibility of holding 2 services; we also recommend that they look at the best way to schedule communion so that all who desire have the opportunity to participate in-person.

It is critical that members of our community not show up for a service they have not signed up for. We don't expect to have room, and unexpected attendees may place the ushers in the difficult position of deciding who gets to attend. We will leave 5 slots open each week so that we can continue to welcome the stranger. We will have an employee of Pathways begin attending two weeks prior to entering this phase to help us fine-tune our visitor protocols, and we will continue to partner with Pathways throughout Phase 4.

During this phase, all individuals in the church will remain masked and maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance at all times. Small groups (up to 4) of vocalists will be able to sing during the service as long as they remain masked. Communion elements will be made available in individual, prefilled, wafer and juice sets.

When we've reached capacity, the front door will be closed and a sign placed on the door indicating that worship is underway, and we have reached capacity. At the end of the service, ushers will direct groups to exit to minimize bunching. People who have parked in the garage will validate their parking tickets as they exit.

During this phase, we would welcome and encourage small groups of church members (commissions, Bible studies, etc.) to begin meeting in a hybrid capacity: in-person (with virtual option) both in homes and in the church. We recommend continuing to schedule outside, masked gatherings as long as the weather allows.

We anticipate as we move through this phase that we will receive additional guidance and information that will change our protocols. When changes are made, we will notify the community via email and place an updated phase matrix on our website and in the weekly newsletter.

## **Phase 5**

This is the return-to-new-normal phase. We don't know yet what protocols will be recommended long-term. We are hopeful that in this phase, we will be able to safely gather unmasked and with no limits on size, sing together, and share communion and meals together. But we are also mindful of one of the big lessons of 2020 - we don't know what we don't know, and in this case, we really don't know what the new normal will look like. While this not knowing can be stressful, it's also an invitation for us to live in the now and rejoice at each small step.