

REGATHERING PLAN (6 October 2021)

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 current 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 and vaccination rates but will only fall back if we see an increased risk to our congregation. As we've observed metrics over the last 18 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, but given our strict masking policies and high congregational vaccination rates, increased community spread alone will not necessarily lead to a fall back in phases.
- If case rates in any region in our area reach 40 cases/100,000, we will cease all in-person services and return back to Phase 1.
- 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.
- 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 request attendees to sign-up ahead of time, 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.
- We will require all staff, in-person choir members, and ushers to be vaccinated.
- We will develop a list of FAQs that will be updated and made available to all. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VTdqtW0J5E7EqRg4ymO1XYtpjaZSnMhrF27pY-QjQzl/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."

Vaccinations

We are fortunate to now be at the stage in this pandemic when safe, effective vaccinations are available for all aged 12 and up and will soon be available for younger people. We encourage everyone to get vaccinated and to encourage your family and friends to also become vaccinated. It is only through widespread vaccination that we will be able to gather again for worship without mitigation strategies.

We are not requiring proof of vaccination to attend in-person Worship or Sunday School and do not anticipate that we will ever have this requirement. While rare, there are some people who are not able to get vaccinated due to pre-existing health conditions. In addition, vaccine distribution and our country's history of medical injustice means that the largest proportion of those who have not been vaccinated reside in many of the most vulnerable communities - the poor, non-English speakers, immigrants, people of color. We do not wish to create additional barriers for folks to attend our services. Finally, vaccination does not guarantee that someone cannot catch or spread COVID. While our vaccines are extremely effective and truly a miracle of science, they are not 100% effective. They are less effective, for example, in some immuno-compromised groups. When community case rates are high, we rely on our congregation's high vaccination rates and our other protocols to protect all who come through our doors.

We will, however, require all individuals who serve the church in the following areas to be vaccinated:

- Staff
- Choir members who rehearse or perform in-person
- Ushers
- Sunday School teachers
- Drop-in Center Volunteers

If you have any questions or concerns about our vaccination policy, please feel free to reach out to Rev. Amanda or any member of the Regathering Task Force

Notification Procedures

If someone who has attended an in-person Church event tests positive for COVID-19, or if someone in their household tests positive, they need to notify Rev. Amanda or Rev. Sam immediately. We will then identify and notify all persons who were present at that event that they may have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19. We will not reveal the identity of that person, though we encourage them to reach out to the community for whatever help they may need.

If you are notified that you've been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, please go to the following website or reach out to the Regathering Task Force to determine next steps.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>

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
3a	50% vaccination; 10 cases per 100,000	Open sign ups of 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.	Choir allowed to conduct masked, distanced rehearsals and stream live from chapel; all in-person choir members must be vaccinated	Short, masked visiting in sanctuary post-service. Communion in large, physically distanced circle.	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 events encouraged	Outside preferred; inside if masked and distanced; no food or drink served inside
3b	Either: 60%	Open sign ups of up to 50	All masked unless speaking; remain at	Choir allowed to conduct masked,	Short, masked visiting in sanctuary post-	No in-person Sunday School or childcare;	Outside preferred; inside if masked and

Phase	Metrics	Who	Safety Protocols	Singing	Other Worship Items	Children	Fellowship
	vaccination and 5 cases per 100,000 OR children 5-11 can be fully vaccinated and 10 cases per 100,000	worshippers plus up to 10 worship leaders/AV folk/ushers; front doors unlocked; public welcomed officially via website	least 3 feet apart; participants complete self-assessment before traveling to the building; no sharing of elevator outside of household groups.	distanced rehearsals and stream live from chapel; all in-person choir members must be vaccinated	service. Communion in large, physically distanced circle or served in pews at ministers' discretion	if a child is assisting with the service, one adult will need to attend with that child; outside events encouraged	distanced; no food or drink served inside
4	70% vaccination; 3 cases per 100,000	Open sign-ups required; no attendance limit	All masked unless speaking; remain 3 feet apart; participants complete self-assessment before traveling to the building; no sharing of elevator outside household groups	Small groups (up to 4) of vaccinated singers allowed during service.	Short, masked visiting in sanctuary post-service. Communion in large, physically distanced circle or served in pews at ministers' discretion	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	Outside preferred; inside if masked and distanced; no food or drink served inside.
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 3a

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 have open sign ups for up to 25 in-person worshippers. Total persons in the sanctuary will be limited to 25 attendees 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 3a and 3b.

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 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, offering plate, 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. 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 self-assessment as part of signing up.

A 3-person usher team will be used each Sunday during Phase 3a. Depending on feedback from the ushers, we may move to a 4-person usher team in Phase 3b. 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. Ushers will need to be vaccinated.

During this phase, the choir will be allowed to conduct masked, physically distanced rehearsals in church space of up to 45 minutes in length. Members attending these rehearsals must be vaccinated. In addition, the choir may stream live from the Chapel during service.

Communion will be conducted in a circle during this phase. Place the two trays with 15 cups each on a table, along with plates of bread. Cover with napkins. (The specific table would be either the communion table on the chancel or a smaller table on the floor, similar to the set up on August 1, 2021. The ministers can decide what works best. In any event, the cups and bread must be covered to protect them from any aerosols during the service since the ministers will be officiating with masks off.) Ask people to create the largest possible circle around the sanctuary. Two people, wearing masks, go around the circle and serve the cups to participants, starting from either end of the circle. Two people, wearing masks, similarly serve the pre-cut bread, using tongs. Ministers conduct communion. After communion, two people go around the circle and collect cups in baskets.

We encourage small groups of church members to find ways to gather outside for fellowship during this phase. Recommendations include gathering at a park or other public venue or small groups meeting in someone's backyard. Masked, distanced fellowship opportunities in the sanctuary will also be allowed during this phase.

Phase 3b

When

- the vaccination rates in our immediate area all reach at least 60% and the case rates fall to 5 cases per 100,000 **OR**
- Children ages 5-12 have had the opportunity to become fully vaccinated and case rates fall to 10 cases per 100,000

we will have open sign ups for up to 50 in-person worshippers. Total persons in the sanctuary will be limited to 50 plus no more than 10 AV/ushers/worship leaders. Protocol from Phase 3a will remain in effect. We will unlock the front door and advertise our in-person worship opportunities on our website and listserv. Folks will be asked to sign up ahead of time to facilitate contact tracing and attendance taking by the ushers and to help ensure we do not exceed the 50 person limit. A sign in form with health screening questions will be provided for all visitors or individuals who did not sign up ahead of time.

Chairs will be set up in the Sanctuary with physical distancing in mind. We recommend that ushers seat larger household groups in the pews. If there are sufficient ushers, we will allow seating in the balcony. The parent/infant room will be available to one family per service; families should indicate on their sign up if they wish to use this space.

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. 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 self-assessment as part of signing up.

At least 3 ushers will be used each Sunday during Phase 3b with 4 preferred. Ushers will need to be vaccinated.

During this phase, the choir will be allowed to conduct masked, physically distanced rehearsals in church space of 45 minutes in length. Members attending these rehearsals must be vaccinated. In addition, the choir may stream live from the Chapel during service.

Communion will be conducted either in a circle or served in the pews during this phase at the ministers' discretion. Process will be the same as in Phase 3a. If the balcony is being used for seating, a tray of bread and a tray of juice will be placed up in the balcony prior to the start of service. People will be asked to create the largest possible circle around the sanctuary with the goal of having at least 3 feet between households. Two people, wearing masks, go around the circle and serve the cups to participants, starting from either end of the circle. Two people, wearing masks, similarly serve the pre-cut bread, using tongs. Ministers conduct communion. After communion, two people go around the circle and collect cups in baskets.

We encourage small groups of church members to find ways to gather outside for fellowship during this phase. Recommendations include gathering at a park or other public venue or small groups meeting in someone's backyard. Masked, distanced fellowship opportunities in the sanctuary will be allowed during this phase.

During Phase 3b we should have a person in the narthex to interact with visitors who may need assistance in following our masking and distancing protocols.

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 conduct sign ups for each worship service. The sign up facilitates attendance taking should contact tracing become necessary.

The weekly sign-up form will include a reminder of the COVID protocols in place and a brief health screening. It will be sent each week to the listserv and posted on the church website. 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 to help ensure the sanctuary does not become too crowded.

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 3 feet of physical distance between households at all times. Small groups (up to 4) of vaccinated vocalists will be able to sing during the service. Communion elements will be made available in individual, prefilled, wafer and juice sets.

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.