

COVID AND SMPC UPDATE MARCH 13, 2021

At our February 9, 2021 meeting, the Session decided that we would not begin the process of considering gathering for in-person and indoors for worship until Multnomah County is at a "moderate risk level" as defined by the State of Oregon's risk classification system. (Basically, this is when we average less than 100 cases per 100,000 residents.) At that time in February, Multnomah County averaged 242 cases per 100,000 residents. In the last released date covering Feb 14 to Feb 27, Multnomah County now has 92.8 cases per 100,000. On March 12, Multnomah County officially moved to Moderate.

So, now we can begin planning what some in-person, indoor gatherings might look like according to the latest science and health department recommendations. But, there are other factors to consider as well.

Currently, the most significant factor to consider in making these decisions is the vaccination rate. As of March 7, there are currently 86,009 out of 821,730 residents of Multnomah County who have been fully vaccinated. This equals a vaccination rate of 10.5%.

We are moving in the right direction, but we still need to take things slowly. The disease is still very dangerous for those who have not yet been vaccinated. Although we miss seeing people face to face, doing the work of the church is not just about meeting inside a building. There are plenty of ways for us to preach the gospel and support one another outside of indoor worship. So, our Session continues to feel that worshipping outdoors and connecting over the phones and online is best way right now to be faithful to Jesus and his call to love our neighbors and care for our community.

Nonetheless, we need to begin the planning now. The Session met last Tuesday night and they are all in unanimous agreement for the following stages of returning to campus according to a progress in health metrics. (Now, please keep in mind that we need to hold these plans loosely. Anything can change.)

First of all, whenever people come to the church, there are some basic Covid screening requirements that we would like to you to respect.

No one is allowed on the church campus, **if in the past 14 days they have had any of the following:**

- Fever or above normal temperature
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Dry cough
- Runny nose
- Loss or reduction in your sense of smell
- Sore throat
- Contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19
- Tested positive for COVID-19
- Awaiting results on COVID-19 test
- Been in close contact with someone who is awaiting results on a COVID-19 test
- Traveled outside of the states of Oregon or Washington.

All people must wear a mask at all times on the campus (indoors and outdoors) – except for the following:

- 1) when you are the only person on campus
- 2) during the recording of certain parts of a worship service.
 - a) Singers and readers must keep their mask on until we are about to record.
 - b) In addition to the above COVID screening, you cannot read or sing without a mask in our sanctuary for a worship recording if you have dined indoors at a public restaurant or coffee shop without a mask in the last 14 days.
 - c) Only one singer at a time is preferred.
 - d) Up to two singers and a wind instrument are permissible, if:
 - everyone understands and is comfortable with the risks
 - members of different households must stand at least 12 feet apart
 - the total time of being maskless together is no more than 15 minutes

NOW, THAT MULTNOMAH COUNTY IS IN THE “MODERATE” RISK PHASE, HERE ARE THE FOLLOWING LIMITS THAT OUR SESSION HAS DETERMINED IS APPROPRIATE FOR OUR CONTEXT:

We still encourage only essential gatherings at the church campus that cannot be done at home or online. Thus, meetings at the church during this time are encouraged to only be for official church business like recording the worship services, cleaning, paying bills and getting mail, and operating the drive-thru food pantry. Unless all committee members are fully vaccinated, committee work should be done at home, over the phone, or online.

Outdoor services approved by Session like for Palm Sunday and Easter will occasionally occur. For outdoor worship, up to 40 cars and 100 people is allowed. Singing with masks on outside is allowed as long as people remain with their households and stand at least 16 feet apart from other households. Again, even though we are outdoors, you are required to wear masks at all times.

Now, that we have moved to the Moderate risk phase and many of our older members have been fully vaccinated, we are allowing for limited small group gatherings on the church campus for activities such as bible studies, committees, and prayer groups with a maximum of 8 fully vaccinated people. ***For unvaccinated people, only 2 different households are allowed to meet together at the church campus for small group gatherings, but still with masks and social distancing.***

In terms of meeting space, we have set the following limits in various rooms:

No more than 8 people in the Sanctuary

No more than 8 people in the Fellowship Hall

No more than 8 people in the Upper Room

No more than 8 people in the Entry Way

No more than 3 people in all other rooms

No more than 20 people volunteering outside on Saturdays for the Food Pantry

No singing indoors except for the production of pre-recorded music for the online worship service. (Remember, the act of singing is equivalent to a sustained cough for several minutes. Singing indoors will be one of the last restrictions lifted.)

WHEN MULTNOMAH COUNTY REACHES AND SUSTAINS "LOWER" RISK (POSSIBLY EARLY MAY 2021?) (LESS THAN 50 CASES PER 100,000 FOR 14 DAYS)

When Multnomah County is under the LOWER risk category, we will consider allowing the following changes:

Small group gatherings on the church campus for activities such as bible studies, committees, and prayer groups with a maximum of 10 fully vaccinated people inside may begin. ***Plus, at this point, we may allow up to 4 different households of "unvaccinated" people to be part of these small groups, but still with masks and social distancing. This could include youth social activities of no more than 4 different households.***

WHEN MULTNOMAH COUNTY IS "LOWER RISK" AND REACHES 25% VACCINATION RATE AND THE PASTOR HAS HAD THE FIRST DOSE OF THE VACCINE FOR 2 WEEKS (POSSIBLY LATE MAY / EARLY JUNE 2021?):

We feel that this is the safest level to begin resuming limited in-person and indoor worship for a maximum of 25 people in our sanctuary with masks and social distancing, but again no singing and no food/communion. Livestreaming the worship service may begin. The service should be kept to under 30 minutes long. And, pre-reservation and temperature check will be required. Music will be instrumental only or pre-recorded video. No bulletins.

Small group gatherings on the church campus for activities such as bible studies and prayer groups with a maximum of 12 fully vaccinated people may begin. ***Plus, now we may allow up to 6 different households of "unvaccinated" people to be part of these small groups, but still with masks and social distancing.***

WHEN MULTNOMAH COUNTY IS "LOWER RISK" AND REACHES 50% VACCINATION RATE AND THE PASTOR IS FULLY VACCINATED (POSSIBLY LATE JULY 2021?):

We can resume in-person and indoor worship for a maximum of 50 people in our sanctuary with masks and social distancing, but still no singing and no food/communion. The service should be kept to under 45 minutes long. And, pre-reservation will be required. Music will be mostly instrumental only and pre-recorded video, but may possibly include a masked soloist. No bulletins.

Medium-size group gatherings can probably now occur with up to 25 people, but still no food or drink. Special youth programming like VBS and ACTS theater may resume, but still with masks and social distancing.

FINALLY, WHEN MULTNOMAH COUNTY IS "LOWER RISK" AND REACHES 75% VACCINATION RATE AND THE STAFF IS FULLY VACCINATED AND THE CASE COUNT IS LESS THAN 10 PER 100,000 RESIDENTS (POSSIBLY SEPT 2021?):

Good news! We should be able to sing freely again with a full service, and we may also consider adding communion and coffee hour. Handing out bulletins, passing the peace, and sharing offering plates will probably be okay at this time. Capacity limits, masks, and social distancing may not be needed. However, we may still need to be cautious with young children depending on vaccine availability and effectiveness for that age group.

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Please keep in mind that anything can change at anytime – especially with the new variants and the effectiveness of the vaccine against them.

We appreciate your patience and your grace and flexibility.

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Upcoming Outdoor Worship Services

March 28 (Palm Sunday) – 10:00 AM

Good Friday, April 2 - 7:00 pm

April 4 (Easter) – 6:43 AM and 10:00 AM