Original: 05/19/2021
Last Revision: 12/13/2021

**First United Church's Reopening Policy**

*Concerns about this reopening policy should be brought to Church Council.*

In light of rapidly evolving guidance from federal, county, and local officials and with the understanding that these guidelines will continue to evolve as the global COVID-19 pandemic continues, First United Church will resume most in-person operations effective Monday, June 7, 2021. The following principles will guide our reopening:

- Safety - The safety of the congregation and the wider community remains paramount. Mitigation protocols must be observed by all participants. Stay safe!

- Trust - The reopening will require significant trust in each other. This will be a collaborative effort involving staff, church leadership, volunteers, the congregation, and the numerous non-profit groups utilizing our building and grounds. Trust and be trustworthy!

- Flexibility - The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and rapidly evolving. Plans may need to be changed. Some activities may not resume exactly as before. Technology might not function as expected. Be flexible!

- Inclusion - As we reopen, First United will make every effort to be as inclusive and equitable as possible. Hybrid or remote options will remain available for most (if not all) church-sponsored activities. Safety practices will consider the needs of everyone but with a focus on those most vulnerable and at risk. All are welcome here!

- Communication - Open communication will be key to reopening and to regathering as a congregation. First United will be prompt and transparent with information related to the reopening and related to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will also be open to feedback on what works and what does not, how protocols and operations might evolve, and what needs might need to be filled/addressed. Talk with us!

- Respect - There are a wide variety of experiences, perspectives, and opinions regarding the closures over the last year, this planned reopening, and COVID-19 itself. Some may feel more cautious than others about rejoining in person. Some may carry the traumas of the last year differently than others. Some may take extra measures (ex: gloves, greater distancing, etc) for their comfort and safety. Show respect for each other!

With those principles in mind, the following update to First United COVID-19 protocols is adopted unanimously by Church Council (Wednesday, May 19, 2021):

1) Social distancing of at least 6 feet should be maintained at all times between individuals, households, or "pods" (people who have decided to group together). Please keep these

distancing guidelines in mind as you select where to sit, stand, or walk during church gatherings.

2) Following current guidance from local health authorities, masks are required at all times while in the building. Masking requirements are rapidly changing throughout our wider community; however, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. It continues to present a real threat to those in our church community, including those unvaccinated, those with compromised immune systems, and those under the age of 5 who are not eligible for vaccination.

In March 2020, First United suspended operations to protect vulnerable members of the congregation. In June 2021, First United reopened with the promise that it would continue to prioritize the health and safety of those without access to vaccinations. Mask wearing and social distancing remain critical tools for creating a safe and welcoming environment for those still at risk.

4) UPDATE: Effective 6/16/21 - The capacity limit for the sanctuary is now 100. Attendance at Sunday Worship will be capped at 100 people. Advanced sign up is no longer required.

Consistent with available safety guidelines and best practices, the Board of Worship and Senior Minister will oversee the safe implementation of:

- greeting/ushering;
- communion;
- offering collection; and
- instrumental and vocal music (to include solo, ensemble, and congregational singing) in consultation with the Music Director.

The capacity limit as well as service mechanics will be reevaluated as guidelines change. Services will continue to be livestreamed and recorded for later viewing.

5) Events involving food and beverage service inside the building remain suspended. Outdoor events involving non-communal foods or beverages (ex: bring your own picnic) are allowed if distancing guidelines can be maintained. [Due to operational needs, Head Start is exempt from this provision. Additional exceptions to this provision may be granted at the discretion of Church Council or its delegate.]

6) All children are welcome and encouraged to attend Sunday services, and nursery and CLT are expected to resume in the fall. Other programming for children may resume subject to the above masking requirements and with the requirement that an adult designated by the parent or guardian remain present with the child or children. Outdoor activities are strongly preferred. [Due to operational needs, Head Start is exempt from this provision. Additional exceptions to this provision may be granted at the discretion of Church Council or its delegate.]

7) Use of the building and grounds should be coordinated through the church office. Each room in the building and covered structure on the grounds has a defined capacity limit. Preference will be given to First United users, but availability of an appropriately sized space is never guaranteed - especially without a space reservation through the church office. Informal gatherings on the grounds can occur without coordination provided participants remain flexible about where they plan to gather.

8) Church activities should include remote access options (ex: Zoom, live stream, recording) for those unable to participate in person.

9) COVID-19-era flexible and remote work arrangements continue to be available to church staff. The Senior Minister will coordinate.

10) First United Church strongly encourages vaccination against COVID-19 and will provide support and assistance to any staff member, congregant, or community member seeking or considering a vaccination appointment. Contact the church office.

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Historical Policy Notes:

## Masking

May 2021:
*Masks will be required for anyone age two and up entering the church building or for any church program for children (indoor or outside). Consistent with CDC guidelines, vaccinated and unvaccinated people should continue to wear masks in larger gatherings and in situations that have been shown to have elevated transmission risk. Globally, church services have been identified as higher risk than activities like grocery shopping. We recognize and will account for those risks in our planning. Additionally, our youngest participants (ages 0-12) do not have access to vaccinations yet, and we have many immunocompromised individuals in the congregation and community. Masks will be strongly encouraged for gatherings held outside on church grounds and required if social distancing cannot be maintained.*

July 2021:

- *Masks are required for unvaccinated individuals at all times while in the building.*
- *Masks are required for all participants/attendees (regardless of vaccination status) during a program or event where children under the age of 18 are present. Children are welcome at all First United-sponsored events and may not be excluded in order to avoid mask-wearing. Some children as young as 12 may have been vaccinated, but age 18 is commonly recognized as the age when independent decision-making about health and safety begins.*
- *Masks are required for all participants (regardless of vaccination status) attending Sunday worship service. Those leading worship may remove masks while conducting their assigned portion of the service. Masks may also be removed briefly for communion.*
- *Masks are encouraged and always welcome during other indoor First United-sponsored meetings and gatherings but are not required for vaccinated individuals when all participants are over the age of 18.*
- *Masks are always welcome during gatherings held outside on church grounds.*
- *Third-party users/groups are expected to follow basic guidelines around masking during their use of the building or grounds. For the safety of others who might also be using the building or grounds, masks should be worn when outside of the designated location of an event (ex: moving through halls while using the sanctuary). Other decisions about masking are left to the discretion of the event organizers and are made at their own risk.*

## Worship Capacity

May 2021
*Sunday worship on June 6 will include 15 congregants attending in person along with staff and volunteers. Starting on June 13, capacity for Sunday worship will be 75 with 60 spaces reserved for advanced signup, 5 spaces available for same-day/walkup, and 10 spaces reserved for ministry staff, service volunteers, and their family members. Seating will be directed. More information to follow.*