

A Guide for Re-Opening Knox Bracebridge

A response to the shut-down caused by Covid-19, Spring/Summer/Fall 2020

Background and Purpose

On March 11, 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic related to the Covid-19 coronavirus. The following day, schools were ordered closed in Ontario, and on March 17 premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency, forcing the closure of many businesses, institutions, and organizations – including houses of worship. At the conclusion of the worship service at Knox on March 15th, the Session met and passed a motion declaring that the church doors would close with a date for re-opening to be determined based on the latest medical and scientific information.

The Session continues to meet throughout the pandemic, and on Friday June 12th decided that the church doors would remain closed for the summer months, with a goal of reinstating in-person worship on September 6th. This decision was reaffirmed at a meeting on Tuesday, August 4th. Throughout this process, the health, safety, and well-being of the congregation and community have been at the forefront of any decisions the Session has – and will – make. To mitigate the threat caused by the Covid-19 virus, this document has been crafted using the latest information from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, along with supporting material from the Province of Alberta and the Session of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Barrie, and Ecclesiastical Insurance. Due to the shifting nature of this pandemic and the resulting political and medical decisions, this document will be updated accordingly.

One of the guiding principles of our Christian faith is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This document reflects our desire to do just that.

This Guide outlines the strategies we will employ at Knox in each of these key areas of our ministries:

- **Worship**
- **Fellowship**
- **Finances**
- **Care and maintenance of the building**
- **Community use of the building**

As the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Nova Scotia, Dr. Robert Strang, has said, this pandemic has created a monumental challenge for the local church, but it has also created an opportunity: an opportunity to discover new ways to reflect Christ's love to our communities (*quote from online workshop, May 28, 2020*).

Worship:

The latest research indicates that the Covid-19 virus is airborne and most easily spreads through droplets projected from talking, coughing, sneezing, and singing. The virus can also be spread by carriers who possess no symptoms themselves but could unknowingly pass the virus on to others who could then become very sick. It has also been declared that the virus is particularly dangerous for the very young and those over age 60; however, no age group is immune. Due to the unpredictable nature of the virus, the Health Unit and The Presbyterian Church in Canada have devised suggestions for mitigating the impact of the virus during in-person worship, which have been adapted for use at Knox as follows:

- Attendance at worship is limited to 30% of the building's capacity. For Knox, this means that no more than 40 people would be allowed to attend the worship service.
- All participants are to be seated six feet apart. Those living in the same household or composing the same 'family bubble' would be permitted to sit together.
- Participants would need to contact the church in advance to inform them of their attendance in order for the worship space to be configured appropriately. It is advisable to have a few ushers on hand to be able to change the seating arrangement at the last minute if necessary.
- If necessary, we will consider providing two services at Knox with at least 30 minutes between services to allow for cleaning. Services are to last no longer than 45 minutes.
- All participants in the worship service are to wear non-medical masks which they can bring themselves or which will be available upon entry. Only those people leading the worship services will not wear masks but are to be situated 15 feet from the congregation.
- Each worship leader is to use a separate microphone and is to maintain physical distancing from one other and the congregation.
- Hand sanitizer is to be readily available throughout the building.
- Unfortunately, there is to be no physical contact with one another, which includes no hand-shaking or hugging.
- Due to the airborne nature of the virus, there will be NO singing, responsive readings/prayers, or use of wind instruments.
- There will be no sharing of objects; thus, no worship bulletins, hymn books, prayer books, brochures, offering envelopes, or pamphlets will be used. All information needed to follow the worship service will be projected.

- Offering plates will not be passed but will instead will be located at the back of the sanctuary.
- Children under two years of age are not permitted to attend the service. There will be no nursery or Sunday School until otherwise advised by the Health Unit.
- Upon entering the church, worshippers will be assisted by two 'greeting elders' whose roles are as follows:
 - One elder is to open the door and greet each participant.
 - Hand sanitizer and masks will be available on a desk at the entrance. The other elder will distribute the sanitizer and masks, ensuring they are not passed from person to person,
 - This elder will record the names of all who attend worship. This is to assist the Health Unit with contact tracing in the event that someone gets ill. Do not pass the pen from person to person but have one elder record all names.
 - Participants will be asked to read and adhere to a Covid-19 screening. Anyone feeling unwell, who has traveled outside of the province, or who has been in contact with someone with Covid-19 will be advised to stay home.
- Participants will then be instructed to proceed to the sanctuary where they will be greeted by an usher who will direct them to their seats, ensuring that family/household groups are seated together and that each grouping is spaced six feet apart. No coats, jackets, or personal items are to be placed in the coat room but are to remain with the owner at all times. Congregants are to be seated from the front to the back of the sanctuary. Unfortunately, you may not be able to sit in your regular spot.
- Communion will be conducted in a way that the elements will not be passed from person-to-person and will proceed under the direction of the Session. An example could be providing the juice and bread in separate receptacles placed at the front of the church with the congregants coming forward to pick up their own items. Those unable to come forward would be served by an elder who would wear masks and gloves.
- Baptisms are to be conducted in a manner that respects six feet of physical distancing. The parent, sponsor, or other family member could administer the water while the Minister oversees the sacrament.
- At the end of the service, participants will be dismissed in family groupings – starting from the back of the room and working forward to the front. Conversation with others is to be limited.
- Worship services will continue to be available online through our website and YouTube channel.

- Any funerals or weddings to be held inside the church building would need to adhere to these guidelines and would require review by the Session beforehand.
- Any outdoor events would be expected to follow these same protocols.
- At the conclusion of the service, congregants will be directed to leave the building, beginning from the back of the sanctuary and proceeding to the front.

Fellowship:

- There will be no fellowship time following the service as participants will be instructed to leave the building in a timely fashion.
- There is to be no sharing of food or drinks within the building until otherwise advised by the Health Unit. The kitchen will remain closed.

Finances:

- The offering plates will not be passed during the worship services, but will be available at the back of the sanctuary for people to place their offering.
- It has been reported that the virus can remain on paper for up to 24 hours, so it is advisable for the offering counters to count and record the offering on Monday, or another day during the week.
- Congregants are encouraged to participate in the financial stewardship of the ministry through online services, such as PAR (Pre-Approved Remittance), using the DONATE NOW button on our website, which connects to Canada Helps, or through e-transfer.

Care and Maintenance of the Building:

- Washrooms will be open and will be limited to one person at a time. Disinfectant wipes will be available in each washroom. An usher will ensure the washroom is cleaned after each use.
- Anyone using church office equipment, including the photocopier, phones, and computers is required to clean and disinfect all touched surfaces immediately.
- All hard surfaces (bookcases, tables, pulpit, etc.) are to be cleaned and disinfected each week.
- All frequently-touched surfaces, such as hand railings and door handles, are to be cleaned and disinfected weekly, or more frequently, depending upon usage.

- To assist in the cleanliness of the building, all flat surfaces (bookcases, tables, etc.) are recommended to be kept clear. Brochures, pamphlets, hymn books, Bibles, and copies of Living Faith are advised to be packed away for now to avoid the passing of materials from one person to another.
- Signs indicating proper distancing, sanitizing, and health concerns are to be posted throughout the building.

Community Use of the Building:

Once regular in-person worship has resumed, the Session and Board will consider opening the building to other community groups. These groups will need to provide *in writing* a document which indicates that they will follow the rules and regulations as laid out by the province and the Health Unit. The building will need to be cleaned and disinfected following each group activity.

Reflection:

The research thus far indicates that the repercussions of the Covid-19 virus will be with us for a considerable length of time. We've heard the phrase 'new normal' to describe the future that we all are now facing – in our communities, our workplaces, and our houses of worship. However, we can go forward with courage and with faith, knowing that God is guiding and directing us to be a comforting and supportive presence for our congregation and our community.

The church has gained a reputation for resisting change, but over these recent months we have proven that massive change IS possible and can even be welcome! While there will be some practices from our past that will not be able to be re-instated, and we will grieve this, we will also look forward with anticipation and joy to the new traditions that we can create together. Through it all, we will strive to be a community where the soul is nurtured, thanks is given, life is celebrated, creation is cared for, justice is sought, and families and individuals are united in an atmosphere of grace and acceptance.

We WILL get through this challenging time – together.

And above all these
put on *Love*
which binds everything together in
perfect harmony.
Colossians 3:14 ESV