

June 14, 2021

Dear members and friends of the Franklin United Methodist Church,

In many ways, things seem to be getting back to “normal.” While the pandemic continues, the light at the end of the tunnel seems to get noticeably brighter each day. In the Town of Franklin, the 14-day number of total COVID cases is in the single digits and has been for several weeks; the positivity rate is below 1%; and, the number of people who are fully vaccinated is increasing rapidly. On Tuesday (June 15), after 462 days, the state of emergency will be lifted in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. With all of this in mind, the Church Council met, on June 13, to review our COVID protocols. Here are some of the major updates I need to share with you:

- **We’re back, fully in-person!** The Metrics for Safer Gatherings, adopted by the Council in March, will no longer be used to determine whether we meet in-person inside, in-person outside, or virtual only. *All activities in the church may resume meeting in-person and in a location most fitting the activity and group.* Many activities, including our worship together, will continue to meet in a hybrid model allowing for virtual and in-person participation.
- **Masks are not required during worship.** All persons who attend worship indoors will be asked to wear a mask over their mouth and nose upon entering, exiting, and while otherwise not seated for worship. *Worshippers may remove their mask once seated for worship.* Worship participants will be seated no less than six feet apart. There will be no congregational singing indoors. When worshipping outdoors, there will be no mask requirements and congregational singing will be encouraged.
- **Masks will not be required for adult small groups, but will be required for small groups including children that meet indoors.**
- **After worship fellowship will resume.** Refreshments will be served outside, weather permitting, after worship to encourage each of us to reconnect with one another.

Enclosed with this letter you will find the full resolution and rationale for our updated COVID protocols. All persons participating in the worship, life, and work of the church *and all outside facility users* are required to follow them. We intend to review these protocols again in the Fall.

If you have any questions about the updated protocols or you just want to chat, please do not hesitate to call, text, or email to setup a time for us to meet. *I look forward to seeing you in worship this Sunday at 10am!*

Peace.

Pastor Jacob

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UPDATED COVID PROTOCOLS

WHEREAS, the number of COVID cases has dropped precipitously in the Town of Franklin and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts;

WHEREAS, the State of Emergency in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be terminated on June 15;

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control has issued new guidance entitled “Choosing Safer Activities” ([see here](#)) which states that fully vaccinated persons may resume most all activities, indoors and outdoors, without a mask while unvaccinated persons are strongly encouraged to wear masks indoors;

WHEREAS, COVID-19 vaccines are readily available for all persons 12+ years of age in Massachusetts, but is still not available for children younger than twelve (12);

WHEREAS, current research suggests that vaccinated persons are highly unlikely to contract and highly unlikely to transmit COVID-19.

WHEREAS, not all persons can receive the vaccine and “herd immunity” has not been achieved;

WHEREAS, Franklin United Methodist Church does not have an HVAC system that filters indoor air and introduces fresh air;

WHEREAS, The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments has released new guidance, entitled “Care-filled Worship and Sacramental Life in a Lingering Pandemic” ([see here](#)) encouraging churches to “stay the course” and maintain “ongoing limitations, such as wearing masks, no congregational or choral singing indoors, shortened services, and no ‘coffee hour;’”

WHEREAS, the New England Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church has issued an addendum to its “Guidelines for In-Person Worship & Ministry during COVID-19,” entitled “Risk Reduction” ([see here](#)) which states that the local church should “encourage everyone to use...a cloth face covering (mask) at all gatherings and whenever they are in the building. (Exception: children younger than 2 years old);”

WHEREAS, one of the guiding rules of Methodism is “Do no harm;”

WHEREAS, Franklin United Methodist Church seeks be a place where *all* persons can worship, live life, and work together;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that beginning, Monday, June 14 the worship, life, and work of the Franklin United Methodist Church shall resume fully in-person with the following protocols in place.

WORSHIP

- All worshippers are asked to wear a mask over their nose and mouth when entering, exiting, and otherwise not sitting in their pew. Masks must be worn when coming forward for communion. Communion should be consumed in the pews. Masks will not be required when worshipping outdoors.

- Worship participants will be seated no less than six feet apart or two empty pews between households.
- Congregational singing is not allowed. “Live” music will resume with a masked and physically distanced choir and/or vocalist. All choir members, vocalists, and accompanists must be fully vaccinated.
- Health questionnaires will no longer need to be filled out by worship participants; however, ushers will need to take detailed attendance. Contact information (phone, email and/or address) must be on file for all worship participants.

LIFE AND WORK (SMALL) GROUPS

- Participants in small groups where only adults are present shall not be required to wear a mask.
- All participants in small groups where children are present indoors shall be required to wear a mask. Masks will not be required for outdoor activities.
- Health questionnaires will not be required; however, detailed attendance must be taken and turned into the church office. Contact information (phone, email and/or address) must be on file for all new participants.

GENERAL PROTOCOLS

- Food and refreshments may be served outside and in settings where social distancing can be maintained. After worship fellowship time should begin immediately, weather permitting, outdoors.
- A person’s decision to wear a mask will be respected.
- All public areas will be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Hand sanitizer will be made readily available throughout the facility.
- A supply of N-95 masks will be kept on hand and accessible for those who may want or need a mask.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that these protocols shall be adhered to by all persons and organizations that use the Franklin United Methodist Church facility. The Church Council may amend these protocols as needed to address the on-going safety and concerns of the church and community.