

### **FMC Guidelines for Reducing Transmission of Covid-19 (and other Airborne/Respiratory Infections)**

Because FMC values Christian community, we present these guidelines to encourage interactions while keeping everyone as safe as possible from catching Covid 19 and other serious airborne/respiratory infections that are currently circulating. We cannot eliminate all risk but following these guidelines will reduce it.

Since March of 2020, medical professionals have re-evaluated many of their assumptions and their knowledge base multiple times. Similarly, the FMC guidelines will change as conditions evolve and knowledge increases.

As of fall 2022, we face a triple threat: Covid-19 variants are shifting, the flu season is arriving early, and other respiratory viruses such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are on the rise. Now that some of the precautions such as masking and social distancing have been curtailed in the larger society, other familiar viruses are circulating at high levels and infections may tax hospitals.

Hearing the same messages repeatedly may be exhausting – mask, vaccinate, boost, avoid crowded indoor situations, improve ventilation – but changing personal behavior is the best option to reduce transmission, according to medical experts.

We encourage all FMC participants to have up-to-date flu and Covid-19 vaccines and boosters as appropriate for their age and health conditions because evidence indicates that vaccines and boosters reduce severe illness and offer added protection against hospitalization. Although variants may continue to arise, vaccines and tests seem to be working as intended in response to those variants.

#### **Food & Beverage**

Because evidence indicates that Covid-19 is not transmitted by eating or swallowing nor by shared utensils, we will be able to increase the options for consuming food and beverage. The Church Life Commission will offer more fellowship possibilities for our FMC family with possible carry-ins, and/or catered meals.

People may serve themselves beverages and food, keeping in mind that creating physical distancing is helpful in reducing airborne or respiratory infections. Participants are encouraged to choose acceptable space between themselves and the people around them while interacting and while getting and consuming food and/or drink.

#### **Facilities**

To reduce the spread of airborne viruses, the building's heating/ventilating/air conditioning unit can be set to circulate air continuously on Sundays and during other activities at FMC.

Groups using the building are encouraged to get in touch with Facilities representatives to be sure the fans are turned on to circulate during gathering/building usage.

#### **Practices for indoor gatherings**

Our goals are

- 1) to establish practices that create the lowest possible risk for transmission of infection, particularly by individuals who may not know they are infected, and
- 2) to nurture congregational life

#### *Worship services and similar large indoor events*

- People in vulnerable groups and/or those with Covid symptoms and/or those who may have been recently exposed are encouraged to participate virtually. (For guidance on symptoms, see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) Live streaming of the worship service and some adult Sunday School classes will be available.
- Greet each other with minimal contact.
- During children's time, leaders will minimize handouts and direct contact.

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- We will use attendance pads in the sanctuary, and ushers will provide bulletins. The order of service, announcements, and scriptures will be sent to the congregation beforehand so they can choose to access them electronically.
- Offering plates will be placed near the front of the sanctuary and the rear doors. Plates will not be passed during the service. We will have time in the service for people to walk to the plates to give their offerings.
- Baptisms can be carried out with appropriate safety measures (distancing, masking, etc.) listed in this document.
- No group prayers that involve the laying on of hands.
- No childcare during the service for the near future.
- We will offer congregational singing. We may also use soloists and/or recorded music and/or instrumental music. Players of wind instruments and masked members of small ensembles and the choir will remain at an appropriate distance from others.
- Outdoor fellowship is always mask optional.

For masks to be effective, they should be “surgical” or “respirator” masks, be fit-tested, and be worn over nose and mouth. People who are at higher risk to experience severe illness from Covid or other airborne / respiratory infections should use an effective mask to provide the highest chance of being protected, regardless of whether or not people around them are wearing masks.

Although mask wearing may be problematic for some participants, we offer a variety of options in order to be inclusive of the most people possible. For this reason and others, one Sunday of each month will continue to be designated as “masks required” in all indoor spaces. We will follow the guidelines below.

<b>Masks optional (most Sundays)</b>	<b>Masks required (designated Sunday)</b>
Masks will be available at the entry door.	Masks will be required for people two years and older. Well-fitted N95 masks are recommended, and proper fitting surgical masks are the next best option. Greeters at the entrance door will remind people to wear masks and will provide masks for those who need them.
Communion will be served in a format that minimizes airborne spread.	Worshippers may remove masks briefly while consuming communion items.
After the service, worshippers can gather in the fellowship hall with masks being optional. People may choose to serve themselves beverages, keeping in mind that physical distancing is helpful.	Masking is required in the fellowship hall. No eating or drinking.
Microphones will be passed during sharing time, and fixed microphones at the front of the sanctuary will be an option.	Microphones will be passed during sharing time. Speakers at the microphones in the front of the sanctuary are encouraged to remove masks for greater intelligibility.

Organizers of large gatherings not occurring on Sunday morning/early afternoon that take place in the sanctuary or fellowship hall will decide and communicate to potential attendees beforehand whether the event is “masks optional” or “masks required.”

*Sunday School*

Sunday school classes for all ages may be held indoors. Sunday school classrooms and other rooms in the building will be masks optional. We encourage parents to make decisions that are appropriate for their children.

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### *Small Gatherings*

For FMC small groups, committees, youth groups, and other small gatherings, participants will follow practices listed earlier in this document, including:

- Non-sanctuary and non-fellowship hall spaces will be mask optional. We encourage parents to make decisions that are appropriate for their children.
- Participants will clean and sanitize spaces and equipment before leaving.

### **Outdoor Activities**

For outdoor activities:

- Masks will be optional
- The pavilion may be used for outdoor classes or other gatherings with well-spaced seating. The garage doors will be kept open on all three sides.
- Participants will clean and sanitize before leaving.

### **Other Activities**

Other activities such as those listed below may take place in FMC facilities, but participants will follow guidelines listed elsewhere in this document.

- Blood drives, due to their medical need and support of the healthcare system stressed by the pandemic and other diseases, can occur.
- Indoor weddings and funerals are allowed and will follow FMC safety guidelines.
- Pastoral care and counseling will be conducted online or by phone if possible. It may be conducted in person within the church building but will follow FMC safety guidelines while also maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
- FMC employees will be able to work from home as needed and/or be assured of working conditions that are as safe as possible if working in the building.
- Service project groups and work groups will follow appropriate safety guidelines.
- Church Life leaders and Faith Formation leaders will encourage virtual interactions for fellowship and/or spiritual growth when possible.
- The Trustees and Faith in Action will confer on when it will be appropriate to use FMC facilities to host Family Promise families.

### **Use of facilities by outside groups**

We encourage outside groups to follow the guidelines we have set for FMC members and participants. However, outside groups may set guidelines suitable to their specific situations.

### **Reporting Covid and Contact Tracing**

If an attendee reports a case of Covid to the Trustees within seven days after participating at FMC, we will contact all attendees (preferably via email) letting them know that they may have been exposed but not revealing the name of the person who has been diagnosed. This process will also apply to non-FMC groups using the building.

### **Following the guidelines**

Attendees might forget at times to act in the low-risk ways included here. Greeters and ushers may remind attendees to follow these guidelines, but other members should feel free to remind attendees about safe practices in a spirit of love and caring for all.

These guidelines will be posted on the FMC website, and oral reminders may be provided on a regular basis.

**Questions?** If you have questions or concerns about these guidelines, please share them with the current FMC Trustees: Marj Rush Hovde, Jyoti Sarkar, and Marcy Major.

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