

PHASED REOPENING OF CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH – OCTOBER 25, 2021

October 2021 Executive Summary

Christ Presbyterian Church (CPC) is using a phased approach to provide for in-person activities, gatherings, and worship. Metrics as suggested by the Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC) and data from Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC) and the Department of Health Services (DHS) websites is used to make decisions.

Since August 2021 CPC moved from Phase 3.0 to Phase 2.5 due to downward trends in COVID-19 measures contributed to the Delta variant. Phase 2.5 allows for in-person worship with added mitigation measures and precautions.

Trends are improving. The October 25, 2021 version adds context to the current situation. The level of community transmission remains classified as “very high” in Dane County (per Wisconsin Department of Health Services [dashboard](#)). Vaccination of younger children has not yet occurred and likely will not until later this year or early next year (5–11-year-old children only). It will take several weeks for this age group to be fully vaccinated once vaccines are approved. Additionally, it is now known that vaccinated individuals can transmit COVID-19 to others if they themselves become infected, with or without symptoms.

This version:

- adjusts Phase 2.5 measures to safely support cold weather indoor activities for children
- applies PHMDC mask order exemptions for the playing of wind instruments during worship and non-worship performances and musical activities
- adds new charts the WCC has provided to assist in determining what church related activities can be done in and how to make such activities safer
- adds a suggested email template for messaging the congregation if an exposure incident occurs
- includes updated references

Introduction

While the doors of Christ Presbyterian Church (CPC) were closed to activities during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21, the Church has been active and vibrant! At the time of CPC closure due to the Safer at Home order, the Session agreed that CPC would remain closed (to worship and building use) until it was safe for our congregation to gather in a large group again. At that time (May 2020) vaccination of individuals against COVID-19 was the assumed indicator for a safe return.

Experience and subsequent knowledge suggest vaccination is not the endpoint for Session to make decisions regarding use of the building and worship practices.

To assist the Session with its decision making, the CPC COVID Committee was established in May 2020. Its purpose- to determine the infection control and mitigation measures necessary to protect the health and safety of CPC staff while following state and county public health guidelines and requirements. The committee has met regularly to provide guidance on infection control and mitigation measures for church programming and to vet requests to use the church facilities.

The CPC COVID committee suggested, and the Session approved, a phased approach as CPC “opens its doors” and considered how to provide for in-person activities, gatherings, and worship. The COVID committee has provided the Session with weekly updates regarding key data points in the metrics suggested by the Wisconsin Council of Churches and approved by the Session to guide its decision making. This version is an update to the original and subsequent versions.

In early July 2021 the metrics for moving to Phase 3 were met. On July 26, 2021, Session approved moving to Phase 3 and resume in person worship. Soon after that decision, the public health situation shifted dramatically due to the Delta variant. On August 9, 2021 the Session held a special meeting a voted to move to Phase 2.5 based upon the fact that in Dane County (and elsewhere in Wisconsin) the metrics for Phase 3 no longer were being met.

(<https://www.publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus/dashboard>)

October 2021 the metrics have improved slightly with 7-day averages trending downwards from August and September. Yet, the level of community transmission remains classified as “very high” in Dane County (per Wisconsin Department of Health Services [dashboard](#)). Vaccination of younger children has not yet occurred and likely will not until later this year or early next year (5-11 year old children only). It will take several weeks for this age group to be fully vaccinated once vaccines are approved. Additionally, it is now known that vaccinated individuals can transmit COVID-19 to others if they themselves become infected, with or without symptoms.

Public health recommendations for infection control measures such as physical distancing, mask use, ventilation practices, and cleaning and disinfection have undergone changes since the original draft of the Phase Reopening document was created and approved. Since the July 15, 2021 version of this document the public health recommendations have changed to include recommendations for universal mask use indoors for all individuals regardless of vaccination status. (Dane County is currently under a mask mandate.) The Wisconsin Council of Churches provided new guidance in response to these changes. BY FAITH WE STAND FIRM: MINISTRY IN THE ERA OF COVID VARIANTS (<https://www.wichurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/By-Faith-We-Stand-Firm-final.pdf>)

The Wisconsin Council of Churches has offered guidance on how to make safer choices, noting that no choice is definitively safe. We can mitigate risk, but not eliminate it. Current recommendations from both a theological and public health standpoint include:

- **Prioritizing life and health of the vulnerable as a Gospel witness.** Concurrent values of this guidance include urgency and care in meeting human needs and attending to equity and accessibility. Take seriously the church's role as community leader, and trust in the resilience of the church.
- **Maintain masking expectations FOR ALL PERSONS indoors and when not distanced outdoors until COVID transmission is very low in the community.** Although vaccination protects us well against serious illness, breakthrough infections do happen, and viral shed of the delta variant can be as high among the vaccinated as among the unvaccinated. This means universal masking is warranted even among the vaccinated.
- **Reinforcing COVID safety protocols in response to the more transmissible COVID variants.**
- **Case tracking and establishing a No-Go threshold.**
- **Maintain virtual/hybrid gathering options.** It may be necessary to switch to gathering the community remotely in case of inclement weather, dramatic spikes in viral activity, or future public health crises. In any case, vulnerable people should not be forced to choose between participating in the life of their community and their own safety.
- Witness to the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). **Help debunk misinformation and disinformation about COVID and vaccination.** Speak up when segments of the population are scapegoated or bullied as spreaders of illness. Help people come to a sound, informed, faithful decision on matters of importance.
- **Support vaccination efforts.**
- Plan on event modifications, mitigations and protective behaviors for many months to come. As much as we long for a different truth, the pandemic is far from over.

Summary and Recommendations from Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC)

The WCC ongoing standard for unsafe/safer/safest gatherings is built on a seven-day rolling average of new cases per 100,000 population, and the rates of positive tests. Safer threshold for gathering is when cases are less than 5-10 per 100,000 population and positive tests less than 10%. Safest would be even lower. Vaccination rates are retained and refer to those fully vaccinated out of the total population.

In September the [WCC guidance](#) added the recommendations for congregations to do a "risk assessment." They also suggested there is a time "when it is necessary to say 'no' as thoroughly as possible." They suggest a level of 50 new COVID cases per 100,000 population per day as a point for faith communities to move to their strictest protocols.

CPC's COVID Committee continues to provide risk assessment by reviewing and providing suggestion for layering mitigation strategies. By adding and layering these measures the risk of COVID transmission can be reduced. The WCC has provided new charts to assist in determining what church related activities can be done in and how to make such activities safer.

UNSAFE TO GATHER WITHOUT MITIGATIONS	SAFER	SAFEST
Vaccination rates <50% AND	Vaccination rates 50-70+% AND	Vaccination rates 70-85+% AND
Viral Transmission ♦ New Cases >10/100K ♦ Positive Tests >10%	Viral Transmission ♦ New Cases 5-10/100K ♦ Positive Tests <10%	Viral Transmission ♦ New Cases <1/100K ♦ Positive Tests <5%

LEAST SAFE	MAKE IT SAFER	SAFEST
♦ Unmasked ♦ No distancing ♦ Full capacity ♦ Assembly singing ♦ Eating together	♦ Universal Masking ♦ Physical distancing ♦ Low-touch environment ♦ Attendance list ♦ Outdoors or increased air exchange ♦ Shortened time of service ♦ Singing by worship leaders only ♦ Focus on sanitizing high-touch surfaces ♦ Vaccine requirement for leaders ♦ Vaccines encouraged for attendees	♦ High Quality Universal Masking (medical grade or N95/KN95) ♦ Physical Distancing ♦ Low-touch environment ♦ Outdoors ♦ Shortened service ♦ No singing ♦ Limited attendance, registration ♦ Sign-ins and tracking seating ♦ Vaccine requirement for leaders and attendees ♦ Maintain streaming and/or hybrid options consistently with fallback plan for outbreaks

ACTIVITY	LEAST SAFE	MAKE IT SAFER	SAFEST
Preaching	Unmasked, close to the assembly	Mask throughout worship, only removing while preaching, maintain at least a six foot distance from congregation	Wear a high-quality mask (N95, KN95 or medical) throughout worship, including while preaching, keeping 10-15 feet between preacher and others. Pre-record sermon and show on screen
Singing	Unmasked assembly	Song leader instead of assembly. Outdoors, masked and distanced. Low volume humming by masked assembly.	Avoid singing until “safest” levels in Table A are met
Eating meals together	Indoors, Buffet	Distribute outdoors, pre-assembled, and/or to-go	Pre-packaged food Home delivery Alternative activities
Eucharist	Unmasked, Tearing bread, Common cup, passed elements	Distanced lines, masks until receiving Celebrant/minister sanitizes regularly Host or pre-cut bread, individual cups	Pre-packaged elements pre-positioned in pews Spiritual Communion
Large Group Celebrations (Anniversaries, Ordinations, etc)	Indoors, no mitigations	Limit number of people in attendance and offer livestream alternative for a wider group Require vaccination for those who will be in attendance Move outdoors, use layered mitigations	Defer until lower COVID transmission levels Record or live-stream an event with minimal numbers of people physically present

Group programs with unvaccinated populations	Indoors (Masked or unmasked)	High quality masks, outdoors [or low density well ventilated], according to risk budget of target population	Online, take-home, supervised mentor or <i>small</i> pod based.
Home & Care Facility Visits	Unmasked Indoors	High quality mask, sanitize hands, be mindful of risk budget of those present, including visitors.	Telephone, video, front porch or walking visits, mail
Infant Baptism	In an unmasked assembly Walking infant through congregation	If rubrics allow, have parents or baptismal sponsors hold the infant. Limit time in the chancel/sanctuary. Avoid walking infant through the congregation for greeting.	Record a small ceremony with the family and a representative from the church which can be shared later with the rest of the church. Defer the baptism until COVID levels are lower and/or the infant is able to be vaccinated.

Summary and Recommendations of CPC COVID Committee

No plan we choose will be definitively safe. While COVID-19 continues to spread and variants exist there will always be risk, particularly for those most medically vulnerable. We are at a point in the pandemic where we must consider “how to live with COVID-19 in our communities.” Taking the [recommendations of the Wisconsin Council of Churches](#), we suggest CPC use a combination of best practice mitigation measures and vital hybrid ministry options. This will allow CPC to be an inclusive body of faith while noting that the time frame for “everyone to go back safely” may not be reached for many months (or even years).

Gathering at full capacity, not wearing face coverings, not social distancing, singing as a congregation, and eating together are all high-risk activities and thus require a phased in approach. Each phase will be held for 4 weeks before changing and would be changed only after evaluation by the COVID committee and the Session. This timeframe is based on viral incubation and transmission timelines. It must also be acknowledged that the possibility exists that circumstances may warrant a move backwards in phases if the metrics indicate a decline during the past four weeks. It is also acknowledged that a dramatic shift in COVID metrics such as is occurring presently may require shortening the decision-making time period to less than 4 weeks.

In accordance with the Wisconsin Council of Churches’ *Safer with Masks* rubric, the CPC COVID committee recommends continuing with indoor worship with close monitoring of the metrics in Dane County and being cognizant of the state situation. Link to Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC) data dashboard: <https://www.publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus/dashboard>

The following outlines the phased approach of CPC and the metrics that were used to determine each phase. This October 25, 2021, version includes adjustments made in August to the 2.5 phase and further suggestions now to support a more controlled and hopefully safer approach to our indoor worship until the metrics improve. At that time CPC could return to the style of worship outlined in Phase 3.

The phases presume a mixed audience of vaccinated/unvaccinated participants. It should be noted that since children under 12 (5-11 year old children only) are not anticipated to be eligible for vaccination until November nor would be fully vaccinated and thus protected for months after reaching eligibility CPC should assume we will be in Phase 3 for an extended period of time. The WCC provides us with wisdom and support as the public health crisis continues.

Phase 1 – CPC staff return to working in person. Metric based on staff (who choose to be vaccinated) have begun/completed vaccination series. Once staff who choose to be vaccinated are “fully vaccinated” office would open to visitors seeking business with CPC. Staff may choose to return to working in person before becoming fully vaccinated per individual decisions. Met timeline for office reopening to visitors –June 1, 2021.

- CPC staff return to office (mask and distancing required even if fully vaccinated). Scheduling of time to prevent concurrent presence in office is no longer required.

- Reopen the office for limited number of visitors (mask and distancing required, bathrooms remain closed for visitors, visitors will be required to call ahead to schedule a visit with staff.).
- Host on-site (indoor) wedding, funerals, baptisms, and memorial services. Size of gathering would be limited by ability to maintain social distancing. Activities and group size would be at pastoral discretion (physical distancing and masks required by participants, suggested that clergy may remove mask while speaking, no congregational singing, couple not required to wear mask for pictures and during ceremony, bathrooms would be open, no food or eating allowed).
- Worship staff could begin live streaming Worship service on Sunday mornings indoors if they choose that option. No congregants would be present. Masks would be worn when not speaking. Physical distancing required. Vaccinated staff would not require to wear masks while singing or speaking with particular attention paid to distancing and optics of spacing.
- Outdoor worship and small gatherings continue per the guidelines used to date.

Phase 2 – Based on vaccination rates $\geq 50\%$, <5 cases/100,000, positive cases $< 10\%$. Met timeline July 1, 2021.

- Small groups allowed to gather indoors (10- 20 size limit). Physical distancing and masks required. No food allowed. Use of bathrooms permissible. Record of attendees is kept by organizer of event. Participant would call or email office if they test positive for Covid-19 within 14 days of attending gathering. Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC) will do contact tracing but an effort to inform participants will be made by organizer of indoor event.
- Participation in small groups is voluntary and not based on vaccination status. CPC will not inquire regarding vaccination status but will encourage vaccination as a recommended public health strategy. It is recognized that children and youth under 12 will not be eligible for vaccination until the end of the calendar year or early 2022. Attendance in small group activities and later in large worship gatherings is a personal choice.
- Singing and playing of wind instruments by small groups indoors during this phase currently (May 17, 2021) are not recommended by the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Session will make determination on allowed activities when phased is entered.

Phase 2.5 – Contingency phase if CPC needs to “fall back” due to downward trends in metrics, exposure incidents traced to CPC, or metrics for phase 3 deemed not attainable by fall 2021. Adopted August 9, 2021 due to dramatic downward trend in metrics. Reviewed and revised October 25, 2021.

- In person worship in sanctuary with use of Narthex to increase room for physical distancing. Number of participants monitored, and participants encouraged to maintain 6 feet physical distancing with those outside of their families or pods. Service no longer than 60 minutes.

- Congregations will be required to wear face coverings at all times unless they report a medical condition which prevents mask use. Extra disposable masks will be available for congregants to use. Signs and gentle reminders from ushers will be method of enforcement.
- Low touch environment will be created.
- Singing only by worship leaders (preferably vaccinated) who are at a distance from congregation (16 feet). Singers and worship leaders may choose to be masked.
- Congregation members participate by “humming” rather than singing.
- Communion served in prepacked method.
- Encourage passing of peace by wave or elbow knock. Only yellow and red name tags will be offered.
- Coffee/social time will be located outdoors only. During inclement weather social time will be canceled. Personal water bottles may be used but individuals should remove mask only during time sipping and replace mask ASAP.
- Small groups, funerals and weddings may be held in accordance with the Phase 1 and 2 guidelines.
- Children younger than 12 who are not eligible for vaccination will have cold weather activities planned for indoors with attempts to maintain six feet of physical distancing as much as feasible.
- CPC will follow the exceptions in the current PHMDC [mask order](#) regarding the playing of wind instruments during worship services and (non-worship) musical performances. It is recommended that worship staff and volunteers continue to wear masks during worship for their own safety. Not everyone attending worship services will be fully vaccinated (including children and adults).
- [Per the mask order](#), masks may be removed “when actively playing a wind instrument that has a fabric bell cover, or similar cover, that acts as a face covering over the instrument, as long as individuals are spaced at least six (6) feet apart at all times.”
- [Per the mask order](#), masks may be removed “while presenting or performing a religious, political, media, educational artistic, cultural, musical, theatrical or other type of presentations for an audience as long as everyone at the performance or event is fully vaccinated and the presenters and performers maintain at least six feet distance from all attendees at all times.”

Phase 3- Based on vaccinations at 50%, <5 cases/100,000 positive cases < 10% with metrics held for previous 4 weeks with no downward trends during that time. Moved to phase 3 August 1, 2021.

- Resume in person worship in sanctuary with use of Narthex to increase room for physical distancing. No limit will be made on number of participants. Worship participants will be encouraged to physically distance based on personal/family comfort level.
- Congregations will be required to wear face coverings at all times unless they report a medical condition which prevents mask use. Extra disposable masks will be available for congregants to use. Signs and gentle reminders from ushers will be method of enforcement.
- Low touch environment will be created.

- Singing by worship leaders (preferably vaccinated) who are at a distance from congregation (16 feet).
- Congregation members participate by “humming” rather than singing.
- Communion served in prepacked method and congregants will take elements home to partake in eating and drinking.
- Passing of peace encouraged by wave, fist bump, or elbow knock. Participants may choose another method of passing peace (handshake/hugs) with which they are comfortable.
- Host on-site (indoor) wedding, funerals, and memorial services keeping in mind need for physical distancing. Post event meals not allowed. Exceptions for adult-only events may be considered.

Phase 4- Based on vaccinations at 70 %, less than 1 case per 100,000 and no evidence of transmission related to CPC activity during past 4 weeks. (Bullet points listed below will be reevaluated at time of move to Phase 4 according to current public health recommendations at that time.)

- Congregants invited to sing with masks in place.
- Communion served in prepacked method and congregants will take elements home to partake in eating and drinking.
- Passing of peace encouraged by wave, fist bump, or elbow knock. Participants may choose another method of passing peace (handshake/hugs) with which they are comfortable.
- Host on-site (indoor) wedding, funerals, and memorial services keeping in mind need for physical distancing. Post event meals not allowed. Exceptions for adult-only events considered.

Phase 5- Based on vaccinations at 70 %, less than 1 case per 100,000, no evidence of transmission related to CPC activity during past 4 weeks, and children under 12 years old eligible to be “fully vaccinated.”

- Mask no longer required but remain optional.
- Congregants invited to sing.
- Resume community meals in fellowship hall.
- “Normal” communion practices resume with no dipping of communion bread in chalice.

Appendix

What to do when someone who attended church was COVID positive and it's hard to think

- Express care and concern. Respond pastorally; see if the person or their household have immediate needs.
- Find out which events they joined physically in the past 2 weeks. Look up the attendance list.
- Contact the local health department and notify them of the exposure.
- Reach out to persons who were at those events and notify them they should quarantine at home for the time being, call their local health department and their doctor for further evaluation and instruction, and find out from their health department or doctor if or when they should get tested.

Sample script: "Someone who was at <x church event> with you on <date> tested positive for COVID-19. We are actively working with the [insert county/city] Health Department to quickly identify, notify, and quarantine anyone who may have come into close contact with them and who may be at risk of getting sick. We are also cleaning and disinfecting to control the spread of illness. We urge you to stay home and contact your doctor and your health department for further evaluation and instruction"

NOTE: You can share event information to help people assess their risk – but do not divulge the name of the person who is COVID positive. In a small church, this may indirectly identify the person, but you should still avoid sharing the name. You can notify by phone, email or mail depending on the size of the event.

- Notify local church leaders and judicatory leaders.
- Make arrangements to cancel church events for the next two weeks and ask your local health department for additional organizational guidance.
- Use a communications template to reach out to the whole church with general information.
- Arrange for the church to be thoroughly cleaned before re-entry.

Messaging to Members

WHAT TO EXPECT

We will:

- Follow Wisconsin Council of Churches and [CDC](#) guidelines
- Wear masks
- Routinely clean venues, atrium, restrooms, and high touch surfaces
- Make hand sanitizer available
- Provide adequate gathering space to allow for physical distanced seating between individuals/groups
- Not provide shared resources such as Bibles, bulletins, or refreshments

We ask you to:

- Wear a mask in the building
- Be respectful of others level of comfort with social and physical interaction
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer frequently. Not attend if exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days (or experiencing symptoms) or have any respiratory illness (COVID-like symptoms)
- Email us if you test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of attending

Suggested template for messaging congregation if exposure incident occurs:

CPC was notified that a community member or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19. [Provide details as needed to allow individuals to identify risk without compromising confidentiality.] We are actively following our COVID protocols and working with Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC) as needed.

We want to inform the CPC community of this and encourage each of us to continue to practice diligence and careful measures to prevent spread. Out of an abundance of caution, CPC staff who were in the building are limiting our contact this week and resorting to virtual meetings for now.

We encourage you to review the CDC website for information about COVID-19, including its symptoms, how it spreads, and actions you can take to protect your health (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>)

The CDC [recommends](#) the following:

"Fully vaccinated people should be tested 3-5 days following a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result."

A known exposure involves close contact of 15 minutes or more if within a distance of 6 feet.

If you had close contact with a person with COVID-19, you may receive notification/information from PHMDC, or from the person themselves. While CPC will not be sharing the name of this, or any other person who responsibly informs us of a possible exposure incident involving CPC services or activities, we encourage using the 6 feet and 15 minutes as a measure of your risk. The universal wearing of masks and our good ventilation helps mitigate the risk.

Thank you for caring for one another as we proceed together, week by week, in faith.

The CPC COVID Team

References

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