**First Parish in Milton, Unitarian Universalist**

**Policies and processes for responding to COVID-19**

**Revised: October 10, 2020**

In mid-March, the First Parish in Milton responded quickly to the COVID-19 “shutdown” to insure the health and safety of church staff, members, friends, and guests. These policies and processes were established to ensure the health and safety of all staff, members, and visitors to the church. This document will be updated in response to changes from the Commonwealth of MA and as we develop new ways of engaging in church life and activities. Consult the weekly LINK and the First Parish website for details on dates, zoom links, etc. If you have questions or suggestions about First Parish COVID policies, please contact Tracey Robinson, chair of the Phased ReOpening task group: tdr02186 at gmail.com.

***General policies and practices***

1. Worship. Sunday worship moved to online streaming in March 2020. Online virtual worship will continue into the 2020-2021 year until gathering in the Meeting House is safe for all participants. A link to online worship is sent to the community every week on Friday. Typically there is a limit to the number of people present in the meeting house in order to “produce” the weekly service, including: the minister or worship facilitator, 1–2 musicians, and 1 technical production assistant. Everyone onsite will follow social distancing precautions, including:
   * wearing masks
   * insuring a 6-10 foot distance from others in the room at all times
   * when on camera, mask can be removed with proper distancing

The weekly offering is collected via a secure online process.

1. Religious Exploration. A story for all ages is part of online worship. In-person RE programming is on hold until further notice. Laurel is developing “at home” RE ideas/kits for families with children. Special projects for middle and high school youth are also under development. Consult the weekly LINK to find out about RE programming developments. If you have ideas for Religious Exploration or Youth activities, contact Laurel Whitehouse.
2. Meditation meetings happen online twice a week: Sunday mornings and Thursday evenings.
3. Church staff. The minister and staff assistant continue to work at the church in separate offices. The church administrator works from home with occasional visits to the office if needed. Other church staff may work in the building as needed. Staff meetings are conducted online. Social distancing precautions are followed by all staff at all times to insure health and safety.
4. Church meetings. Most church meetings (committees, small groups, etc.) have moved online. See attached policy on “small group meetings” for guidelines for in-person meetings – based on state guidelines and restrictions.
5. Rentals. Most church rentals have been suspended until further notice. Some rentals may be permitted based on nature of the request and current state of COVID restrictions. See attached policy for rental policies.
6. Church check-ins for all visiting members and guests. The office has established a process for tracking all visitors to the church campus. All guests and members are requested to sign-in whenever they visit the church.
   * Please enter through one of the authorized doors: the two “back doors” into the link (Office and Social Worker doors) or the door into the Parish Hall or the parking lot door on the lower level. Please do not Meeting House door at this time.
   * There is a clipboard inside each entrance. Everyone entering the church is asked to sign in and out.
   * This process will enable any necessary COVID tracking.
   * Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.
7. Rites of Passage. Memorial and funeral services (and any other scheduled rites of passage) will be held online OR in small groups – outdoor meetings limited to 50 people. Social distancing precautions will be observed for all in-person gatherings.
8. Pastoral care. The minister oversees pastoral care activities and insures that appropriate communication happens regularly with members who are vulnerable or unwell. Pastoral care assistants will assist by keeping the minister informed of members who become ill or in need of ministerial pastoral care.
9. Church building maintenance and cleaning. A thorough cleaning of all church buildings was done in March; regular cleaning of rooms used is done by the sexton. Anyone entering the building should sanitize all used work surfaces after use.
10. Supplies. The church maintains a stock of hand sanitizer, disinfecting supplies, bathroom soap and supplies to be used as needed and in emergencies. All staff were given reusable fabric masks (thank you Amy Norton) at the beginning of the shutdown.
11. Communication/signage. The weekly LINK is the primary form of communication with the congregation. Members are encouraged to read for updates and activities. Broadcast emails are also used for important announcements to the entire congregation. Signs are posted on the church grounds to indicate that worship is being livestreamed on Sunday mornings. Discussion on improving and diversifying communication is a priority with the office and leadership.

***Guidelines for small group meetings***

In March 2020 all First Parish small groups and committees shifted from in-person meetings to “meeting” online using ZOOM. This continues to be the safest way to gather together and connect with each other during the COVID pandemic – even during the MA Phased Re-opening.

As the phased re-opening in the state of MA proceeds, some people have asked if it might be possible, within the current guidelines, to hold in-person gatherings. The FPM Phased ReOpening task group offer the following guidelines, updated from state and federal restrictions effective October 7, 2020.

Gathering size limits:

* Outdoor gatherings (preferred) are limited to 50 people assuming the space is large enough to accommodate 6+ foot distance between all participants
* Indoor gatherings *in the Parish Hall only* for committee/church meetings for up to 12 people, may be approved on request. Guidelines include:
  + All meetings must be cleared and scheduled through the church office. Staff will aim to insure a 24 hour gap between meetings.
  + Masks are required and 6+ foot safe distancing should be observed at all times.
  + All standard COVID precautions and the guidelines for “In-person gatherings” (below), should be followed at all times.
  + The Chase Parlor and Kitchen are CLOSED. Please do not enter.
  + The public bathroom nearest the Parish Hall may be used, if necessary. Please take care to clean up after using. Church staff will insure thorough cleaning between meetings.
  + Tables and chairs in Parish Hall may be used but should be disinfected after each use.
  + Meetings should be as short as possible – agendas should be optimized to reduce risks of long exposure.
  + At this time we are not approving gatherings which include singing/vocalists or physical/exercise activities because of increased risks associated with these types of activities. Please contact Rev Lisa or a member of the Phased Re-Opening task group if you have questions on this limitation.
  + NOTE about windows. Although the instinct of opening windows for ventilation is in line with many COVID recommendations, please DO NOT try to open windows during the fall and winter months. We will be closing the storm windows in early October to conserve energy. The windows are also not in great shape so attempts to open would be unsafe – for the windows and for you. Thanks.

**For ALL in-person gatherings**

In addition to # limits above, please follow these guidelines regardless of meeting location:

* All should refrain from physical contact: hugs, handshakes, fist pumps
* All must maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from all others in the group at all times.
* All must wear masks.
* All participants should check their own temperature directly before any meeting.
* All hands should be washed before and after the meeting. Bring hand sanitizer to minimize use of bathroom facilities.
* Avoid sharing or passing supplies – e.g. printed agendas, copies of documents, pens, clipboards, etc.
* Church bathroom use should be on emergency basis only and all used knobs/faucets/etc. should be cleaned if possible, between uses.
* Avoid sharing of food unless all bring their own food/drink and maintain 6-10 feet distance during eating.
* Strongly recommend that if ANY member of the group feels unsafe in meeting, the group continue to meet online until ALL feel safe to meet in-person.
* If you become ill with COVID 1-7 days after an in-person First Parish gathering, please contact Rev Lisa immediately.

***Any meeting may increase the risk of exposure to COVID so remember the recommended prevention measures:***

* **Wash your hands often** with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
* **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose and mouth.
* **Disinfect surfaces/objects that are frequently touched** (like doorknobs and countertops) with household cleaning spray or wipes.
* **Cover your mouth** when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
* **Stay home if you are sick** and avoid close contact with others.

***Guidelines for church rentals***

1. The church administrator is responsible for managing all rental requests and contracts. See the existing church contracts for typical rental requirements.
2. Rentals during COVID are required to follow the “small meeting guidelines” with limits on number of participants, requirements for COVID safety protocols, etc.
3. Rental agreements must include liability waver.
4. Rental agreements must include process for ensuring anyone entering the building has personally confirmed that they have not been exposed to COVID within the previous 48 hours and that they do not currently have any symptoms of illness.
5. Rental agreements must include provision for how thorough cleaning will happen before/after all visits to church property including who will conduct cleanings and how costs will be covered.
6. The Church Administrator will consult with the minister and the Phased ReOpening task group if she has questions or concerns that are not addressed by existing policies and guidelines.

Thank you

Phased Re-Opening Task Group

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