

Guidelines for Returning to In-Person Worship

Montauk Community Church

Following are draft recommendations for a gradual returning to in-person worship at MCC. The process of full return to “normal” could take up to a year or more, depending on the progression and ongoing threat from the Covid 19 virus to the safety of our congregants and the wider Montauk Community. Any timelines proposed here are necessarily flexible and could be moved forward or back depending on circumstances.

NOTE: These guidelines deal only with returning for MCC worship. The Session will need to develop further plans regarding other building use and activities, both by MCC and outside user groups.

Theological underpinnings of re-opening:

When Jesus was asked, “Which commandment is the first of all?” he answered with a two-fold yet, we believe, inseparable response; “*You are to love the Lord your God with all heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*’ *The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.*”

To love God is to love neighbor. To love neighbor is to love God. For the follower of Jesus, one does not exist without the other.

Priorities in Decision Making:

The number one priority in determining the timing, conditions, and degree of returning will be minimizing risk to our members, visitors, and the wider Montauk Community. We will strive to express our love for God in allowing love for our neighbor to guide our decision making.

We will be guided by recommendations of medical professionals such as the CDC and WHO and we will live within the limitations set forth by federal, state, and local officials. We will return no earlier, nor in greater numbers, than they allow at any given time. However, we may delay various aspects of returning beyond those guidelines based on our own particular situation here at MCC.

We will be in conversation and seek some coordination with our sister church at St. Therese, however, recognizing there are significant differences in the two churches’ facilities, practices, and worshipping communities. our decision making will be based on what feels best here at MCC,

Current Stage – recorded worship only

As of March 19, 2020, all worship services, group activities, and meetings have been suspended in the building indefinitely. This includes outside user groups with the exception of AA and Al-anon groups with special use restrictions having been placed on them as well.

We have been recording a weekly worship service in the sanctuary, normally on Friday or Saturday morning (social distancing being practiced).

Will continue worshipping through online recorded services only at least through Sunday, July 5, and possibly longer is Session so decides.

The sanctuary is open every day from approximately 8am until 7pm for individual prayer. The pew backs and sides are wiped down with disinfectant daily.

The church cleaning crew, in addition to their regular full Wednesday cleaning, have been coming several extra days each week to disinfect areas in the Fellowship Hall, Office area, and associated bathrooms that have been used the previous day.

Stage One Returning to In-Person Worship – outdoor worship only:

- 1. Recorded weekly worship services will continue** even after gathered services begin again - at least until that time when the church can fully be open and accessible to all potential worshipers without limitation due to Covid19. This will enable those who are not comfortable gathering yet to still be connected to the church and to have a weekly worship experience.
- 2. Sunday worship will be held outside only, on the front lawn**, weather permitting. If there is rain, no worship will be held that week. The services will not be moved inside during Stage One due to inclement weather. We will announce cancellations through email and the MCC Facebook page.

The Service length will be shorter than normal – 30-40 minutes.

We will have two worship services each Sunday, at 8:30am and 10:30am, separated by enough time to move people in and out safely and disinfect chairs and equipment.

We will limit people able to attend – the number to be determined based on situation, current state restrictions, and available space.

Social distancing will be maintained at 6 foot minimum. Same household families can sit as a group but 6' distance will be maintained between them and next worshiper. Ushers will assist in directing seating.

No hand shaking by Greeters/Ushers,

Ordered entry and exit from worship area to maintain 6 feet distance.

Masks required by all attendees including worship leaders/pastor.

No Passing of Peace.

No passing of offering plates – offering will be placed in “plate” by each giver either upon entry/exit to worship area. We encourage online giving.

No singing – no choir, no soloist, group, or congregational singing.

No pew Bibles. No hymnals. Prior to service, bulletins handed to individual worshipers by Ushers wearing mask and disposable gloves. After service, bulletins deposited in box/garbage can by worshiper on way out and discarded.

No Fellowship Hour. Limit rest room use to those outside the downstairs Fellowship Hall

Hand sanitizer available as people enter worship area.

Area on ground marked to set up chairs ahead of time to set spacing. People asked to bring their own folding chairs to minimize cross contact, but will have some available for those who forgot. All church chairs will need to be disinfected immediately after each service.

No Sunday School or Nursery provided. Parents responsible for children throughout service.

Will rent/borrow/purchase limited amplification equipment for these services as needed.

Outdoor-only worship may continue through the summer – will revisit and shift as conditions indicate.

Communion: The Sacrament is central to regular worship and we should plan for ways to celebrate it. That being said, it will have to look different and we will have to do so with safety in mind.

- *Communion only by coming forward – no passing of plates/trays down the aisle.
- *Will need to be circular flow to and from the serving station.
- *Elder preparing communion must wear mask and disposal gloves for all preparation.
- *Bread to break and cup poured will not be served to people. Separate elements for congregation
- *Individual bread pieces served by elder to each person using tongs or disposable gloves to pick up and place in hand or pre-sealed packaged bread/cup distributed with attention upon arrival by usher with gloves/mask.
- *We reaffirm that it is perfectly fine to choose not to receive communion on a given Sunday

We will not be able to accommodate extra people beyond what the area will safely allow within existing state safety guidelines.

Stage Two Returning to In-Person Worship – limited indoor worship:

- 1. Recorded weekly worship services will continue** even after gathered services begin again - at least until that time when the church can fully be open and accessible to all potential worshipers without limitation due to Covid19. This will be to enable those who are not comfortable gathering yet to still be connected to the church and to have a weekly worship experience.
- 2. Sunday worship held with limited seating in the sanctuary.** May not begin until Fall. The following recommendations are somewhat fluid and could change based on medical recommendations and safety needs at the time we seek to re-enter.

We encourage higher-risk category members (age, medical conditions, etc.) to continue to worship through online services.

The service length will be shorter than normal – probably 30-40 minutes.

We will have two worship services each Sunday, at 8:30am and 10:30am, separated by enough time to move people in and out safely and disinfect chairs and equipment.

We will limit people able to attend – if 6 foot spacing is still the norm then approximately 20-25 people can gather at a time in our sanctuary. Every third row and alternating rows on either side of the center aisle, the number to be determined based on situation, current state restrictions, and available space.

Same household families can sit as a group but 6' distance will be maintained between them and nearest occupied pews. Ushers will need to direct seating.

No hand shaking by Greeters/Ushers,

Ordered entry and exit from worship area to maintain 6 foot distance.

Masks required by all attendees including worship leaders/pastor.

No Passing of Peace.

No passing of offering plates – offering will be placed in “plate” by each giver either upon entry/ exit to sanctuary. We encourage online giving.

No congregational singing – no choir – soloist or small group singing may be possible depending on recommended guidance – prerecorded music may be a possibility.

No pew Bibles. No hymnals. Prior to service, bulletins handed to individual worshippers by Ushers wearing masks and disposable gloves. After service, bulletins deposited in a box/garbage can by worshiper on way out and discarded.

Sanctuary windows open when weather allows.

No Fellowship Hour. Limit restroom use to those outside the downstairs Fellowship Hall

Hand sanitizer available as people enter the worship area.

No Sunday School or Nursery provided. Parents responsible for children throughout service.

Communion: The Sacrament is central to regular worship and we should plan for ways to celebrate it. That being said, it will have to look different and we will have to do so with safety in mind.

*Communion recommendations same as Stage One

Stage Three Returning to In-Person Worship – a new “normal” indoor worship:

- 1. Recorded weekly worship services should continue** for some time after we get back to a “regular” open service in the sanctuary - at least until we reach a point where everyone is comfortable returning to the sanctuary. This could last until the end of the year or beyond.

2. Sunday worship held with open seating in the sanctuary. May not begin until First of the new year or later, depending on the virus situation. The following recommendations are somewhat fluid and could change based on medical recommendations and safety needs at the time we seek to fully re-enter.

Service returns to regular length over time.

Singing gradually reintroduced into worship. Soloist and small groups, followed by choir and, lastly, congregational singing as medical recommendations allow.

Various elements of worship to be evaluated prior to and during Stage Three to see if/when/how they will be reintroduced. ie: Passing of Peace, communion methods, offering methods, Fellowship Time, etc.

The transition from one Stage to another may be less like flipping a light switch and more like gradually turning up a dimmer.

This approach to re-entry is similar to the primary, but often misunderstood, reason most non-medical personnel are wearing masks: we wear them, not primarily to protect ourselves from illness, but to prevent ourselves from possibly spreading a disease we may already be carrying to others. We wear them as a means of caring for neighbor, particularly the most vulnerable among us. We do it because we care about our fellow MCCers – because we care about our fellow Montaukers – because we care about whoever it is seeking spiritual solace at our doors.

Approved by the Session of Montauk Community Church June 9, 2020