



Morden Mennonite Church: Returning to In-Person Worship Services

(Drafted September 2, 2020)

Church Council has determined that we will return to in-person worship services starting on **September 13, 2020**. This will coincide with a greater use of our facilities for specific church and community programs. In-person Sunday School, Youth, and some other church programs will not begin immediately; participants will receive more information from leaders. Participants in community programs hosted by our church should look to those program organizers for information.

Please note that this is not a “return to normal,” but a return to gathering for worship and programs as safely as we can. COVID-19 is a reality we will have to learn to live with for some time yet.

Earlier in the summer, Church Council, the Church Ministries Committee, and the pastors discussed the criteria which would need to be met for us to gather in person in worship. The result of these discussions was summed up in three goals: 1) the ability to ensure the safety of all who gather for our worship services in person; 2) the ability for all who wish to attend our in-person worship services to attend; and 3) the ability for us to worship in person in a way that fits with who we are as a church and our Anabaptist convictions. We believe the protocols outlined below will help us to achieve these goals as safely and practically as possible. Although these protocols may seem overwhelming, they will become more comfortable as we get used to them.

General Comments

- **These protocols are subject to public health orders.** If we need to suspend services or close the church building, we will do so.
- **These protocols are governed by public health guidelines.** For church worship services this currently includes measures such as regular handwashing, physical distancing from other households, recommended use of masks, discouraging of communal singing, a maximum of 30% of facility capacity, recommended registration for gatherings, discouraging of lingering indoors, using a single point of entry, and thorough cleaning of spaces and materials after use.
- **These protocols have developed out of discussions by Church Council, the Church Ministries Committee, the Worship Committee, the Christian Education Committee, and among the pastors.** In addition to Manitoba Health regulations and guidelines, attention has been given to what other churches in the area are doing.
- **We are planning a “blended” approach to our church services and programs this fall, with both in-person and online options.** We will continue to have online worship services available each week. These will not be live-streamed services (we do not have that technological capability yet) but will be similar to what we have been doing in recent months. These may be somewhat different than the in-person services, but we will strive to keep them as similar as possible.
- **We rely on everyone’s continued patience and kindness!** These protocols may not be comfortable or convenient; you may not even think they are necessary. We are doing our best to meet or exceed government guidelines and to balance concerns regarding health and safety with our desire to gather again in person. We value all constructive feedback as we step forward together.

Joining Our In-Person Worship Services (Full Protocols)

The week before each service:

- If you would like to attend the upcoming Sunday's worship service **you will need to register with the church office by phone (204-822-7450) or email (mordenmennonite@outlook.com), giving the names of those in your household who will be attending.** This registration ensures we have the space to accommodate all who wish to come. It also provides a record of people present should public health officials need it for contact tracing in the event of a COVID-positive worshiper. If you wish, you can also provide an item for congregational sharing at this time (see below).
- Note: If you have not registered in advance and you would still like to come, you are welcome. If we have adequate space for you, you will be registered at the door and you can join us.

On Sunday morning before the service:

- **Do a self-assessment:**
 - *Have you been outside of the western provinces or western Ontario in the last 14 days?*
 - *Have you been in contact in the last 14 days with someone confirmed to have COVID-19?*
 - *Have you been in a setting in the last 14 days that has been identified by public health as a risk for acquiring COVID-19?*
 - *Do you have a fever, or shortness of breath, or a cough, or unusual fatigue, or loss of taste or smell?*

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, please do not come. If you answer "yes" to the last question, consider contacting Health Links at 1-888-315-9257.

- **Please arrive after 10:10 am and no later than 10:30 am.** This will allow everyone to be settled in place (including greeters and ushers) by our 10:40 start time. Note that services will be shorter than they have been (approximately 45 minutes) to reduce time indoors in close proximity.
- **You will enter through the back (north) door of the church from the parking lot.** The front door will only be used for those with special mobility challenges. Please remain in household groups 2m/6ft apart as you wait to enter the church.
- **A volunteer will greet you at the door and check your registration** (or register you if you haven't pre-registered and there is room for you to attend). **Each person will sanitize their hands** with the sanitizer provided. **Masks will be required**, with the exception of young children and those with breathing difficulties. You are encouraged to wear your own mask; if you do not have one, one will be provided.
- **After entering you will stand in line in household groups** at 2m/6ft distance down the hallway toward the entrance to the sanctuary.
- **An usher will greet you at the sanctuary entrance and take you to sit in your household group in one of the designated spots.** A specific pew can be requested, as long as there is sufficient space for your household. The balcony will only be used for overflow seating after our lower sanctuary limit is reached.

During the service:

- **As much as possible, mics will not be shared.** When mic-sharing is needed, the mic will be sanitized between use.
- **Speakers and vocalists on the platform will be permitted to remove their masks** so their words can be more easily understood. They will be placed well back from the first row of worshipers.
- **Instead of congregational singing, you will be encouraged to hum along, mouth the words, or reflect on the words being sung.** Hymnbooks and songbooks will not be used; words will be projected on the screens. If you wish, you can bring your own hymnbooks and songbooks, or borrow some from the church to bring each week. There will be instrumental music and individual or small ensemble vocal music. Participants will be appropriately distanced from each other and the congregation.
- **Parents are encouraged to bring their own books or toys for their children and keep these items with them.** Pre-packaged activity bags will also be available. If a parent needs to leave with a young child for a time, they may use the foyer. The nurseries will not be available.
- **The children's story time will be a pre-recorded video, or a story shared from the front with the pictures visible on the screens.** Children will remain with their parents for the children's story time.
- **For the congregational sharing time, you are encouraged to submit your sharing item to the church office during the week before.** These will be read by the worship leader during the service. If anyone has an urgent item on Sunday morning to share, the worship leader will come to you at that point in the service, listen to you share it (or receive a note from you with your sharing item on it), and then repeat it for the congregation to hear.
- **An offering basket will be available at the entrance to the sanctuary, or you can give electronically (see the church website for info).** There will be no offering plate passed.
- **There will be no physical contact across household groups.** Physical distancing is required throughout the church, except for passing by someone (such as going down the aisle to use the washroom). This means no "passing of the peace" that requires close contact.
- **There will be no shared food or drink before, during, or after the service.** This will affect our communion services; please watch for information leading up to those services. This also means there will be no Common Ground coffee time before the service.

After the service:

- **You will be ushered out of the sanctuary, from back to front, by household groups.** As you exit the church you will be encouraged to **sanitize your hands** with the sanitizer provided. Special thanks to our greeters and ushers!
- **Please do not "linger and mingle" in the church building.** If you wish to do so outside of the building, maintaining safe distances, you are welcome to do so.
- **The church will be cleaned for the next event.** Special thanks to our custodians!

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As we return to in-person worship services on **September 13**, here's what you need to know. These protocols are subject to Manitoba Health regulations and guidelines. While they may seem overwhelming at first, we will become more comfortable with them over time!

The week before each service:

- **Register with the church office by phone (204-822-7450) or email (mordenmennonite@outlook.com), giving the names of those in your household who will be attending.** This ensures we have the space to accommodate all who wish to come, and it provides an attendance record should public health officials need it in the event of a COVID-positive worshiper.
- **If you have not registered in advance and you would still like to come, you are welcome.** If we have adequate space for you, you will be registered at the door and you can join us.

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- **A volunteer will greet you at the door and check your registration** (or register you if you haven't pre-registered and there is room for you to attend). **Each person will sanitize their hands** with the sanitizer provided. **Masks will be required during the service itself**, with the exception of young children and those with breathing difficulties. You are encouraged to wear your own mask; if you do not have one, one will be provided.
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- **The church will be cleaned for the next event.** Special thanks to our custodians!

If you have questions about these protocols or would like more information about how these came to be developed, please see the full document available at the church office or at www.mordenmennonitechurch.com.