

# **CHURCH REOPENING GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES**

**Approved by Session: July 12, 2020**

**Updated: January 14, 2021**



**St. James Presbyterian Church**  
**Church Reopening – Guidelines and Procedures**

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**LETTER FROM SESSION**  
**Guide to Church Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Church life at St. James has taken on quite a different look since COVID-19 took hold in our city. Though we know there is no perfect substitute for gathering together in person, we hope you are taking part in our gatherings online—whether that’s worshipping via Zoom, our website or on Facebook, participating in our virtual coffee hour after service on Sundays or visiting with church friends by phone, email or online.

Following its meeting on May 10, Session appointed a church reopening task force to create guidelines and procedures that will allow us to resume in-person church activities in a safe manner as we move through Washington State’s phased reopening plan. In developing this guidance, the task force studied what is currently known on the mechanics of virus transmission and drew from two main sources:

- [Healthy Washington - Roadmap to Recovery](#) by Washington State
- [Recommendations on Reopening Congregations](#) by the Northwest Coast Presbytery

Session approved these guidelines and procedures on July 12, 2020, and the task force updated them on January 14, 2021, in accordance with new state guidelines. The guidance document is now based on Washington’s two-phased approach to reopening and will guide all church activities through this pandemic. The task force will remain in place throughout all phases of reopening, and church guidelines and procedures will be updated as state, local and presbytery recommendations and guidance continue to evolve.

Please know that these guidelines and procedures have been developed with attention to our specific circumstances and demographics at St. James. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to reopening. Session must do what it feels is right to protect the people of St. James. The decisions we make can mean the difference between life and death, and Session believes it’s best to err on the side of caution.

A few notes: As we move into a new phase, it may take time to ramp up our operations since there is volunteer training involved. We ask that you please be patient. We are trying to open our building in the safest manner possible. It is possible that based on virus activity and metrics defined by the state, Whatcom County could be moved back into a prior phase with more restrictions.

Even after vaccines are widely available and in use, no guideline or procedure is 100% foolproof in keeping you healthy. Every member of this community will need to make the decision on when it’s best to come back to St. James. Until vaccinated, those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19 are encouraged to worship from home. (See Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications.)

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All those over 2 years old who come through our doors will be required to wear a mask and adhere to social distancing guidelines while in the church building. If you cannot wear a mask or prefer not to wear a mask, we ask that you worship from home. This decision—as well as our other guidelines and procedures—are to protect the people of this community.

Thank you.

Session of St. James Presbyterian Church

### **Session Members**

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**SUNDAY MORNING CHURCH ACTIVITIES**

**Phases 1 and 2**

- At the discretion of Session, worship service may be held inside the church building. St. James will continue to livestream its service indefinitely.
- A maximum of 47 people may attend in-person worship service in the sanctuary.
- Though not a requirement, those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19 are encouraged to worship from home. (See Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications.)
- Enter through the office door. Exit through the narthex doors.
- All persons entering the building must take their temperature via a wall-mounted, no-touch thermometer and wear a mask.

**Worship Leaders**

- Stay home if you have experienced symptoms within the last 48 hours or if you suspect you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. Symptoms include cough, fever, chills, muscle pain, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, sore throat or a new loss of taste or smell.
- Office door should be used as an entrance. All other doors should remain locked.
- Position volunteer(s) outside of office entrance near a table, which should have a collection of masks, hand sanitizer and printed bulletins (for those who are not following the service via a smartphone app).
- Once the attendance limit is achieved, the entrance door should be closed and locked. A sign should be placed on the entrance door to express the church's apologies and policy.
- Keep all doors open to the sanctuary to minimize touchpoints.
- All participants two years and older must wear a mask at all times while inside the church building and take their temperature via the wall-mounted, no-touch thermometer at the entrance door.
- All participants must maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from their own household.
- No nursery. No Godly Play classes. No children coming forward for the children's message.
- No in-person adult education classes. Out of consideration for those who are at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, please hold adult education classes online.
- Remove hymnals, Bibles, pew pads and other material from pews. No name tags.
- No singing or humming during service.
- No choir activities.
- No use of wind instruments. Employ string instruments and handbells (if participants are properly distanced).
- Minimize congregational responses in the liturgy.
- Employ alternative ways of passing the peace to maintain social distance.

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- No serving of the Lord’s Supper while masks are a requirement during worship.
- Encourage online giving but have a basket at the back of the sanctuary for those wanting to give in person. Those handling the offering after service must wear gloves.
- Ensure outside narthex doors are open at the end of service so congregants may easily exit the church building.
- No indoor fellowship after service. Outdoor fellowship is allowed, but no food or drink may be served. All participants must wear masks and maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from their own household.

#### **Worship Participants**

- Though not a requirement, those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19 are encouraged to worship from home. (See Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications.)
- Stay home if you have experienced symptoms within the last 48 hours or if you suspect you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. Symptoms include cough, fever, chills, muscle pain, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, sore throat or a new loss of taste or smell.
- Take your temperature upon entering the building via the no-touch thermometer at the entrance door.
- All congregants over 2 years old must wear a mask at all times while inside the church building.
- All congregants must maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from their own household.
- Sit in a pew that is not roped off.
- All children must stay in the pew with their family. There are no nursery services or Godly Play classes. Children should remain in their pew during the Children’s Message.
- No singing or humming while inside the church building.
- No indoor gathering before or after service.
- Exit through the narthex doors.
- If participating in outdoor fellowship after service, you must wear a mask and maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from your own household.

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**PASTORAL CARE FOR DEACONS**

**Phase 1**

- To protect those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, no in-person meetings. Instead, deacons should call, email/write and/or hold online meetings with those needing pastoral care.

**Phase 2**

- To protect those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, no in-person meetings. Instead, deacons should call, email/write and/or hold online meetings with those needing pastoral care.

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**CHURCH MEETINGS/EVENTS: Higher risk persons**

Definition: Meetings/events—excluding Sunday morning church activities—that include participants who are at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. This includes those who are 65 years and older. (See Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications.) Note: Guidance for Sunday morning church activities can be found in the Sunday Morning Church Activities section of this guidance document.

**Phase 1**

- Out of consideration for those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, meeting/event leader should hold meetings online or via phone or email.
- If there is a need to meet in person, indoor meetings/events are prohibited.
- Outdoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 10 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- No food or drink may be served.

**Phase 2**

- Out of consideration for those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, meeting/event leader should hold meetings online or via phone or email.
- If there is a need to meet in person, indoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 5 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- Outdoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 15 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- If meeting/event needs to be held inside the church building, meeting/event leader must reserve room in advance and must adhere to the St. James Building Use: General Guidelines and Requirements; Scheduling Building Use; Building Disinfecting Guidelines; and Building and Room Capacity Requirements.
- All participants who enter the building must sign in at the entrance door.
- All participants must wear a mask, take their temperature at the entrance door and maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from their own household.
- No food or drink may be served.

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**CHURCH MEETINGS/EVENTS: 10 to 64 years**

Definition: Meetings/events—excluding Sunday morning church activities—that include participants who are between 10 and 64 years old and do not include anyone at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. (See Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications.) Note: Guidance for Sunday morning church activities can be found in the Sunday Morning Church Activities section of this guidance document.

**Phase 1**

- In-person meetings/events are discouraged. Meeting/event leader should instead hold meetings online or via phone or email.
- If there is a need to meet in person, indoor meetings/events are prohibited.
- Outdoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 10 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- No food or drink may be served.

**Phase 2**

- In-person meetings/events are discouraged. Meeting/event leader should instead hold meetings online or via phone or email.
- Indoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 5 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- Outdoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 15 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- If meeting/event needs to be held inside the church building, meeting/event leader must reserve room in advance and must adhere to the St. James Building Use: General Guidelines and Requirements; Scheduling Building Use; Building Disinfecting Guidelines; and Building and Room Capacity Requirements.
- All participants who enter the building must sign in at the entrance door.
- All participants must wear a mask, take their temperature at the entrance door and maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from their own household.
- No food or drink may be served.

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**CHURCH MEETINGS/EVENTS: 9 years and younger**

Definition: Meetings/events—excluding Sunday morning church activities—that include participants who are 9 years old and younger and do not include anyone at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. (See Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications.) Note: Guidance for Sunday morning church activities can be found in the Sunday Morning Church Activities section of this guidance document.

**Phase 1**

- In-person meetings/events are discouraged. Meeting/event leader should instead hold meetings online or via phone or email.
- If there is a need to meet in person, indoor meetings/events are prohibited.
- Outdoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 10 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- No food or drink may be served.

**Phase 2**

- In-person meetings/events are discouraged. Meeting/event leader should instead hold meetings online or via phone or email.
- Indoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 5 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- Outdoor meetings/events may have a maximum of 15 people from outside of each household, with a limit of two households.
- If meeting/event needs to be held inside the church building, meeting/event leader must reserve room in advance and must adhere to the St. James Building Use: General Guidelines and Requirements; Scheduling Building Use; Building Disinfecting Guidelines; and Building and Room Capacity Requirements.
- All participants who enter the building must sign in at the entrance door.
- All participants must wear a mask, take their temperature at the entrance door and maintain a distance of 6 feet minimum from anyone who is not from their own household.
- No food or drink may be served.

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**TENANT MEETINGS/BUILDING USE**

**Phases 1 and 2**

- Maximum occupants are based on room occupancy limits. Occupancy is specified by room as indicated with signage not to exceed 25% room capacity.
- Tenants must complete a Tenant Use Request Questionnaire.
- Permission to use the building shall not be granted until the tenant has signed a new contract, stating that they have received, read and agree to abide by the St. James Building Use: General Guidelines and Requirements; Scheduling Building Use; Building Disinfecting Guidelines; and Building and Room Capacity Requirements.
- No food or drink may be served. The kitchen is closed.

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**BUILDING USE**

**General Guidelines and Requirements**

**Before Entering Building**

To gain building access, you must answer “NO” to the following questions:

1. Are you CURRENTLY SICK with any of the following symptoms: cough, fever, chills, muscle pain, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, sore throat or a new loss of taste or smell?
2. Have you had CLOSE PERSONAL CONTACT with anyone who has been diagnosed or awaiting test results for COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

If you answered YES to either question, DO NOT enter the church building.

If you answered NO to both questions, you may proceed with the following conditions:

You must agree to:

- Review and comply with all St. James COVID-19 procedures.
- Properly wear a mask at all times (those 2 years and older).
- Use only designated entry and exit points.
  - NOTE: This does not apply during emergency situations.
- Maintain social distancing.
- Notify St. James at (360) 733-1325 if you become sick after participating in a tenant activity.

**Entering Building**

- Enter using the designated entry point (exterior door at mailbox).
- Use the hands-free, wall-mounted thermometer for temperature screening.
  - If the alarm sounds, exit immediately via the designated exit point.
- Record your name, email address and phone number in the logbook using a pen from the “clean” cannister. Place used pen in the “dirty” cannister for disinfecting.
  - NOTE: Name-only is required on subsequent sign-ins.
- Proceed directly to your designated activity room.
- Do not loiter in common areas.

**Exiting Building**

- Prior to leaving, note any unsafe conditions, lack of supplies or suggestions for process improvements and place comments in the box immediately adjacent to the exit point.
- Dispose of any used disinfecting supplies or PPE in trash receptacles provided.
- Depart using the designated exit point (right-hand narthex doors).

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**Emergency Procedures**

Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 should immediately return home and contact their healthcare provider to test for COVID-19.

Should a person fall ill while at St. James:

- Identify a location where the person can be isolated from others until safely transported home or to a healthcare facility.
- Inform individuals who have had close contact with the person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms and follow Washington Department of Health guidance if symptoms develop.
- Advise sick staff members to go home and isolate, call their healthcare provider and not return until they have met Washington Department of Health criteria to discontinue home isolation.
- Close off areas used by a sick person and do not use them until after these areas have been cleaned and disinfected. Wait 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting.
- The church office will contact the Church Reopening Task Force, and a member of the task force will notify the Whatcom County Health Department of the confirmed case of COVID-19, or if two or more possible cases are identified within 14 days of each other. Contact information: health-BRT@co.whatcom.wa.us, (360) 778-6100 or (360) 715-2588 (after hours).

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### Scheduling Building Use

- All meetings must be scheduled through the church office by email (office@saintjamespres.org).
- Meetings may not start early.
- Meetings shall end on time.
- Individuals/groups must vacate the building promptly at the scheduled end time.
- A copy of the current building schedule shall be posted on the bulletin board next to the church office. In case of conflict, the schedule posted in this location shall be the determining factor for building use.
- The Building Use Coordinator, or designee, shall have final approval authority for scheduled use of the building. The Building Use Coordinator/designee SHALL keep the building schedule up to date.
- Any change to the posted schedule requires the approval of the Building Use Coordinator/designee. Tenants impacted by a schedule change shall be notified within 30 minutes of making the change. If notification is via voicemail, a follow-up email must also be sent.

### Scheduling Guidelines

- For planning purposes, a scheduled event will include the items below:
  - Event start times should be on the hour or on the half hour.
  - There will be a 30-minute gap between events scheduled in the same room.
  - The total duration for an event should include the following:
    - Actual event
    - Room/building disinfecting time (suggested: 10 minutes).
    - At least 15 minutes of deconfliction time after disinfecting so one group has time to exit the building before the next group enters. Large groups will need additional time.

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**Building Disinfecting Guidelines**

Groups utilizing St. James spaces will be required to disinfect “high-touch surfaces” immediately following their activities. See details under Disinfecting below.

For the purpose of this document, it is necessary to differentiate between **cleaning** and **disinfecting**:

- **Cleaning** involves soap and water application, mopping, dusting, vacuuming and other activities associated with the normal maintenance and upkeep of the building. These duties will be performed by the St. James janitorial service.
  
- **Disinfecting** is the application of disinfectants with the specific purpose of killing the COVID-19 virus. Groups utilizing spaces at St. James are required to disinfect high-touch surfaces related to their activities. High-touch surfaces include but are not limited to tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks. Disinfecting supplies and instructions are provided.

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**Building and Room Capacity Requirements**

Participating activities are required to abide by guidelines found at [Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery](#).

**Phase 1**

Per Washington State guidelines:

- Indoor social and at-home gatherings are prohibited.
- Outdoor social and at-home gatherings are limited to a maximum of 10 people from outside of your household and are limited to two households.
- Worship services are limited to 25% of room capacity or up to 200 people, whichever is less, so long as 6 feet of physical distancing can be achieved between households.
- Business/employer activities: Remote work is strongly encouraged; 25% capacity otherwise.

During Phase 1, activities must not exceed the capacity limit posted for each room. These limits are:

**UPPER LEVEL**

Interfaith	Interfaith-only
Upper Meeting Room	Interfaith-only
Balcony	12

**MAIN LEVEL**

Sanctuary	47
Horizon Room	10
Lounge	10
Church Office	2
Pastor's Office	3
CFM	2
Youth Room	1
Library	3

**LOWER LEVEL**

Fellowship Hall	50
Godly Play	10
Meditation Room	4
Resource Room	4
Bayside Co-op	10

NOTE: The maximum total building capacity is 159 people.

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### **Phase 2**

Per Washington State guidelines:

- Indoor social and at-home gatherings are limited to a maximum of 5 people from outside of your household and are limited to two households.
- Outdoor social and at-home gatherings are limited to a maximum of 15 people from outside of your household and are limited to two households.
- Worship services are limited to 25% of room capacity or up to 200 people, whichever is less, so long as 6 feet of physical distancing can be achieved between households.
- Business/employer activities: Remote work is strongly encouraged; 25% capacity otherwise.

During Phase 2, activities must not exceed the capacity limit posted for each room. These limits are:

#### **UPPER LEVEL**

Interfaith	Interfaith-only
Upper Meeting Room	Interfaith-only
Balcony	12

#### **MAIN LEVEL**

Sanctuary	47
Horizon Room	10
Lounge	10
Church Office	2
Pastor's Office	3
CFM	2
Youth Room	1
Library	3

#### **LOWER LEVEL**

Fellowship Hall	50
Godly Play	10
Meditation Room	4
Resource Room	4
Bayside Co-op	10

NOTE: The maximum total building capacity is 159 people.

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**GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS**

**Guidance on Persons at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Complications**

Older adults are at greater risk of requiring hospitalization or dying if they are diagnosed with COVID-19. As you get older, your risk of being hospitalized for COVID-19 increases. According to the CDC, 8 out of 10 COVID-19 deaths reported in the U.S. have been in adults 65 years and older.

Adults of any age with the following conditions are at increased risk of severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19:

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
- Obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or higher but <40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)
- Severe obesity (BMI ≥40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)
- Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
- Sickle cell disease
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus
- Down syndrome
- Smoking
- Pregnancy

Based on what the CDC knows at this time, adults of any age with the following conditions **might be at an increased** risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19:

- Asthma (moderate-to-severe)
- Cerebrovascular disease (affects blood vessels and blood supply to the brain)
- Cystic fibrosis
- Hypertension or high blood pressure
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from blood or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, HIV, use of corticosteroids or use of other immune-weakening medicines
- Neurologic conditions, such as dementia
- Liver disease
- Overweight (BMI > 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, but < 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)
- Pulmonary fibrosis (having damaged or scarred lung tissues)
- Thalassemia (a type of blood disorder)
- Type 1 diabetes mellitus

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**References**

<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/information-for/you-and-your-family/adults-65-and-over>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/COVID19-What-You-Can-Do-High-Risk.pdf>

[https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/HealthyWashington.pdf?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/HealthyWashington.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

<https://medium.com/wagovernor/inslee-announces-healthy-washington-roadmap-to-recovery-229b880a6859>

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