

REOPENING STRATEGY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji

The Reopening Strategy Task Force (RSTF) has recommended to the E-Free Bemidji Elder Board that we reopen the church facility and resume in-person Sunday morning worship services and on-site ministry events on June 28, 2020. We believe that we will be able to open safely according to our stated Guiding Principles on this date.

These recommendations are based on the Stay Safe MN *Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening: Faith-Based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals* (7/22/20) and the *Guidance for Providing Food and Beverages for On-site Consumption at Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings* (6/12/20). As the Stay Safe MN guidelines are updated and restrictions are lessened, the RSTF will revisit these recommendations and will make any necessary changes when it is deemed safe to do so.

UPDATE: The RSTF has proposed the following highlighted changes and additions for the E-Free Bemidji Elder Board's approval based on the 7/22/20 Minnesota Governor's Executive Order 20-81. These recommendations were approved by the E-Free Bemidji Elder Board on 7/23/20.

I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Gospel-centered

In all that we do, we are seeking to become fully devoted followers of Jesus together. The gospel must shape both our attitudes and our actions as we develop and implement a reopening strategy.

2. Maximize health and safety, minimize risk

Our objective is not to open our facility and resume normal operations as quickly as possible. Rather, we are pursuing a strategy that allows us to open our facility and resume on-site ministry as safely as possible.

3. Prayerfully dependent on God's wisdom

We are wholly dependent on God's wisdom. Scripture calls us to ask in faith for wisdom and reminds us that God generously provides wisdom when we pray.

4. Open to but discerning of common-grace wisdom

We will take advantage of and will consider with discernment available resources and information that might prove helpful in developing and implementing a reopening strategy.

Yet, all human-wisdom must be considered in light of Scripture, our final and highest authority.

5. Marked by grace and humility leading to unity

We are a people who are saved by grace through faith in Christ, the one who, for our sake, humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Our individual thoughts and opinions on reopening may not be uniform, but as brothers and sisters united in Christ, a united strategy will require of us grace and humility.

6. Inclusive of our entire church family

We will pursue a reopening strategy that takes into consideration what is best for our guests and for all who call our church home—from our youngest children to our oldest members and everyone in between.

7. Demonstrates love of neighbor

We recognize that our reopening strategy affects not only our church family but will also have an impact on our local community and area churches. In all that we do, we desire to act in love for our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and in love toward our neighbors.

8. Honors divinely instituted governing authorities

Scripture instructs us that we are subject to the governing authorities that God himself has instituted and established for our good. We will seek to show honor to whom honor is due as we develop and implement our church's reopening strategy.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IN-PERSON SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP SERVICES

1. Live Stream Service

The 8:30 A.M. Traditional Worship Service and the 10:45 A.M. Contemporary Worship Service will continue to be live-streamed and made available to view on our church website (www.efcbemidji.org) and through other streaming platforms (Roku, AppleTV, FireTV) for those who are unable or who choose not to attend in-person worship gatherings at this time. For more information on our live stream viewing options visit <https://efcbemidji.org/livestream-options/>.

2. Personal Hygiene and Safety

- a. All staff¹, volunteers², and attendees³ who consider themselves “at risk” are encouraged to continue to stay home until they deem it is safe to resume in-person gathering.
- b. All staff, volunteers, and attendees who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 or who have been in close contact with a household member with COVID-19 are advised to continue to stay home until symptoms no longer remain or until any designated quarantine period has finished.
- c. All staff, volunteers, and attendees are urged to wash their hands upon entering the building and whenever necessary while on-site.
- d. Hand sanitizer and facial tissues will be provided throughout the building for convenience. Automated touchless hand-sanitizing stations are on order and will be installed and available on-site once we receive them from the distributor.
- e. ~~All attendees will be strongly encouraged, but not required, to wear a face mask while on-site. A limited supply of face masks will be made available for those who do not have a mask but who wish to wear one.~~ **In compliance with Minnesota Governor Walz’s Executive Order 20-81, as of July 25, 2020:**
 - (1) All staff, volunteers, and attendees are required to wear a face mask (face covering) while indoors on-site.
 - (2) Staff and volunteers are required to wear a face mask when serving outdoors on-site in situations where social distancing cannot be maintained.
 - A face covering must cover the nose and mouth completely. The covering should not be overly tight or restrictive and should feel comfortable to wear.
 - Any mask that incorporates a valve that is designed to facilitate easy exhaling, mesh masks, or masks with openings, holes, visible gaps in the design or material, or vents are not sufficient face coverings because they allow droplets to be released from the mask.
 - A face covering is not a substitute for social distancing, but is especially important in situations when maintaining at least a 6-foot distance from other individuals who are not members of the same household is not possible.

¹ Staff: Any full- or part-time employee of the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji.

² Volunteer: Anyone designated as serving on-site during a worship service or other event.

³ Attendee: Anyone on-site not designated as a staff member or volunteer.

- A limited supply of face masks will be made available for those who need one.
- f. All staff and volunteers will be expected to wear a face mask while serving on-site. Masks may be removed temporarily at the discretion of the staff member or volunteer when it significantly impedes their ability to serve. Staff and volunteers serving on-site may temporarily remove their face mask when speaking or preaching from the platform or in front of a group, rehearsing or leading singing from the platform, or while practicing or playing a musical instrument that cannot be used while wearing a mask. Social distancing must be maintained at all times in these situations.
 - g. The following persons are exempt from the requirement to wear a face mask:
 - (1) Children under age 2 years must not wear face coverings.
 - (2) Children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old are not required to wear face coverings, but are encouraged to wear a face covering when in public if they can do so reliably in compliance with CDC guidance on *How to Wear Cloth Face Coverings* (i.e., without frequently touching or removing the face covering).
 - (3) Persons who have medical or other health conditions, disabilities or mental health, developmental, or behavioral needs that make it difficult to tolerate wearing a face covering.
 - (4) Any person who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, sleeping, incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
 - (5) Alternatives to masks such as clear face shields may be worn for those with health conditions or situations where wearing a mask is problematic.
 - h. All staff, volunteers, and attendees will be strongly encouraged to allow for social distancing of at least six feet while on-site especially in common areas where space is limited.
 - i. All staff, volunteers, and attendees will be encouraged to avoid physical contact such as shaking hands, hugging, etc. with others not from their household while on-site.
 - j. No food or drink, other than what may be provided for Communion, will be provided on-site (i.e., coffee, treats, homemade goods, etc.). Individuals may bring their own food or drink for personal consumption while on-site, but are advised to only share with members of their own household.

- k. All attendees should be aware that singing, such as in a gathered worship setting, has been deemed to be a higher-risk activity for the spread of COVID-19. While we will not be requiring nor recommending that persons refrain from singing on-site, attendees should be aware of the increased risk.
- l. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to minimize shared contact with equipment and furnishings (e.g., tech equipment, microphones, pulpit, music stands, piano/organ, etc.). When possible, all shared equipment should be disinfected after each use.

3. Seating and Occupancy

- a. Seating in the Sanctuary will be reduced in order to accommodate for the required social distancing of at least six feet between people who are not from the same household.
- b. Overflow seating will also be made available in the Fellowship Hall and in the Youth Room if additional seating is needed. The worship services will be simulcast to the overflow rooms.
- c. Maximum occupancy in the Sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, and Youth Room will not exceed 50% room capacity for those spaces and must not exceed 250 persons.
- d. Chairs will be arranged in the Sanctuary to allow up to four members of the same household to be seated together for the service. Chairs will be arranged in the Youth room to allow for more than four members of the same household to be seated together.
- e. Tables and chairs will be set up in the Fellowship Hall to allow for groups of up to 8 people from the same household to sit together for the service.
- f. In order to maintain proper social distancing, it is recommended that members of different households not sit together.
- g. In order to maintain proper social distancing, it is recommended that seating not be rearranged to accommodate for larger groups from the same household.
- h. Prior to each worship service, it is recommended that attendees not congregate in common areas in order to allow for sufficient social distancing.
- i. Parents and guardians are encouraged to not allow their children to walk around the facility unattended in order to ensure proper social distancing.

- j. Following each service, it is recommended that attendees not congregate in common areas in order to allow for sufficient social distancing and to allow for sufficient time to clean the facility as necessary.

4. Cleaning and Safety Protocols

- a. Hymnals and Bibles will be removed from the Sanctuary and will not be available in overflow seating areas. Lyrics and Scripture references will be projected on screen. Attendees are welcome to bring a Bible or other media for personal use.
- b. Quiet packs for children will be removed from the Sanctuary and will not be available in overflow seating areas.
- c. Offering plates will not be passed during the service to receive tithes and offerings. Instead, a secure giving receptacle will be made available for those attendees who wish to give a physical gift of cash or a check. Alternate forms of giving are available and details about ways to give can be found on our website at www.efcbemidji.org/give.
- d. On Communion Sundays, the bread and the juice will be made available as individual pre-packaged servings for those who wish to participate in the Lord's Supper. Staff and volunteers involved in any distribution will be required to wear gloves and a face mask while they are preparing or serving Communion.
- e. Where possible, doors will be propped open to reduce the need to touch door handles.
- f. All areas of the church facility, especially the restrooms will continue to be regularly and thoroughly cleaned. Foot-operated door pulls have been installed on restroom doors, and disposable toilet seat covers are available in most restrooms. Touchless soap dispensers have been installed in some restrooms .

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

1. Sunday School

- a. Sunday School classes will not be offered for children at this time.

2. Nursery

- a. When sufficient nursery staff and/or volunteers are available to serve on-site, the nursery will be available for families who wish to utilize the service.

- b. Toys, furnishings, and other shared items will continue to be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- c. Toys and other items that cannot be safely cleaned or sanitized will be removed from the nursery.
- d. Child check-in and check-out will only be conducted by nursery or Kids Min staff and volunteers. To avoid shared contact of equipment, self check-in will not be available.
- e. If snacks are provided by the church for the children in the nursery, they must be individual pre-packaged servings. Nursery staff and volunteers are expected to wear gloves when distributing any food.

3. Kids Church

- a. Children will be encouraged to use provided hand sanitizer upon arrival to the Kids Church room.
- b. Children will be encouraged to maintain proper social-distancing of at least six feet when gathering together.
- c. Child check-in and check-out will only be conducted by Kids Min staff and volunteers. To avoid shared contact of equipment, self check-in will not be available.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WEEKLY ON-SITE INTERACTIONS

1. Staff

- a. All staff may continue to work on-site as they deem for themselves safe to do so.
- b. All staff are urged to wash their hands upon entering the building and whenever necessary while on-site.
- c. All staff will be encouraged to maintain proper social-distancing of at least six feet when gathering in common areas, office spaces, and other areas of the facility.
- d. All staff are expected to wear a face mask in common areas in the building when interacting with visitors to the building. Masks may be removed temporarily at the discretion of the staff member or volunteer when it significantly impedes their ability to serve. **Staff may temporarily remove their face mask when alone, such as**

when working in a private office or similar space. Staff should carry a face mask with them to be prepared to wear when no longer alone.

2. Meetings and Ministry Events

- a. Meeting and gathering spaces should be arranged to allow for attendees to maintain proper social distancing of at least six feet between people not from the same household. Meeting attendees will be strongly encouraged to allow for social distancing of at least six feet while on-site.
- b. Maximum occupancy in any gathering space may not exceed 50% of the room capacity for those spaces and may not exceed 250 people in one space.
- c. Outdoor meetings or ministry event gatherings must not exceed 250 people and must allow for attendees to maintain proper social distancing of at least six feet between people not from the same household.
- d. All attendees are urged to wash their hands upon entering the building and whenever necessary while on-site.
- e. ~~All attendees will be strongly encouraged, but not required, to wear a face mask while on-site.~~ All staff, volunteers, and attendees are required to wear a face mask (face covering) while indoors on-site.
- f. Staff and volunteers are required to wear a face mask when serving outdoors on-site in situations where social distancing cannot be maintained.
- g. If food or beverages are provided for an event, the following precautions must be taken:
 - Attendees are strongly encouraged to maintain a minimum of 6 feet of distance between participants not from the same household.
 - Indoor and outdoor occupant capacity must not exceed 25% and not more than 250 persons.
 - Table seating will be limited to 4 persons, or 6 if part of the same household.
 - Staff and volunteers are expected to wear face masks at all times while serving food or beverages.
 - Attendees are strongly encouraged to wear masks when not eating or drinking.

3. Building Rentals and Non-Ministry Building Usage

- a. At this time, outside events and building rentals are not permitted on-site.
- b. Weddings and Funerals hosted may be permitted on-site on a case-by-case basis as deemed appropriate under the discretion of the staff and Elder Board.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONDING TO ON-SITE EXPOSURE TO COVID-19

1. If it has been determined that someone who was present on-site for a worship service or other event has tested positive for COVID-19, the RSTF will convene as soon as possible to determine if a temporary ceasing of in-person gathering is warranted.
2. If so determined, the RSTF will recommend to the Elder Board that the facility be closed until it is deemed by the RSTF safe to reopen again and resume in-person gathering. The Elder Board will make the final decision whether or not to close the building.