

REOPENING STRATEGY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji

Latest Update (04/29/21):

Changes or deletions to the existing recommendations have been marked by a ~~strikethrough~~. Updates and additions have been marked in **bold type**.

- Updated: III. 3. Seating and Occupancy (pp. 5-6)
- Updated: VI. 2. Meetings and Ministry Events (p. 9)
- Updated: VI. 3. Food and Beverages (pp. 9-10)
- Added: VI. 5. On-Site Organized Sports (p. 10)
- Added: VII. 1. Life Groups (p. 11)

The Reopening Strategy Task Force (RSTF) 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. To date, we have been able to safely remain open according to the following stated Guiding Principles and Recommendations.

These recommendations are based on the Stay Safe MN *Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening: Faith-Based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals* (**updated 4/15/21**). 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.

I. RESPONDING TO REPORT OF ON-SITE EXPOSURE

We are very pleased that since reopening our facility on June 28, 2020, our current practices have allowed us to minimize the risk of exposure and to safely host on-site ministry opportunities. In the event that the RSTF, staff, and/or the Elder Board becomes aware of someone who was present on-site that has tested positive for COVID-19, the RSTF, staff, and/or the Elder Board will assess the level of risk to the broader congregation in cooperation with public health officials and will make any necessary recommendations.

II. 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.

III. 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. 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.

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.

- (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.
 - A limited supply of face masks will be made available for those who need one.
- f. 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, 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. **As of March 15, 2021 seating capacity may resume at 100% as long as 6 feet of social distance is maintained between households and masks are worn.**
- b. Seating in the Sanctuary will be ~~reduced~~ **arranged** in order to accommodate for the required social distancing of at least six feet between people who are not from the same household.
- c. On-site attendees will be asked to sit by household and allow for two empty chairs between households. **Attendees arriving together may sit with one another as a group/cohort of no more than six people.**
- d. Overflow seating will also be made available in the Fellowship Hall and in the Youth Room if additional seating is needed. **Additional overflow seating may be available in the Multi-Purpose Room/Gym for special events.** The worship services will be simulcast to the overflow rooms.
- e. ~~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.~~
- f. ~~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.~~

- ~~g. 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.~~
- ~~h. In order to maintain proper social distancing, it is recommended that members of different households not sit together.~~
- ~~i. In order to maintain proper social distancing, it is recommended that seating not be rearranged to accommodate for larger groups from the same household.~~
- j. Prior to each worship service, it is recommended that attendees not congregate in common areas in order to allow for sufficient social distancing.
- k. Parents and guardians are encouraged to not allow their children to walk around the facility unattended in order to ensure proper social distancing.
- l. 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 .

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUSIC MINISTRY

1. Choir Ministry

Based on the latest Stay Safe MN guidance for places of worship (3/12/21), the RSTF recommends that the choir ministry be permitted to resume practices and performances with the following guidelines in place. The RSTF also recommends that both the 8:30 and 10:45 music ministry teams adopt the following safe practices.

- a. Vocal performers may temporarily remove face coverings during indoor musical performances when a face covering cannot be worn due to the nature of the performance, provided that social distancing is always maintained. Face shields could be considered as an alternative in these situations.
- b. Vocal performers must wear face coverings during indoor practices.
- c. Musicians playing a woodwind or brass instrument may remove their face covering during an indoor practice or performance if the face covering cannot be used while playing the musical instrument, provided that social distancing is always maintained.
- d. Performers must maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet between performers (singers and musicians).

V. 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.

VI. 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. 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 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.

3. Food and Beverages

If food or beverages are provided for an event, the following precautions must be taken:

- a. Attendees are strongly encouraged to maintain a minimum of 6 feet of distance between participants not from the same household.
- b. Attendees must be seated at a table while eating and drinking. Table size is limited to 6 people.**
- c. Attendees are encouraged to remain at one table for the duration of the event and are encouraged to avoid moving from table to table while eating or drinking.**
- ~~d. Indoor and outdoor occupant capacity must not exceed 25% and not more than 250 persons.~~
- e. Food and beverage service is allowed as long as it is ensured that social distancing is maintained in the service area, hands are being sanitized, and participants wear face masks in the service area.

- f. Face coverings may be temporarily removed to enable eating and/or drinking when attendees are seated and apart from members of other households but must be put back on when not eating or drinking.
- g. Self-service of food and beverages is not recommended. Food and beverages should be plated and served by a designated member(s) of the group, a serving team, or designated kitchen volunteers. Servers are asked to wear a face covering and disposable gloves.
- h. Groups of 30 or less may serve food that has been prepared at home. Best practice would be to minimize the number of people preparing and/or handling the items being served.
- i. Groups of 30 or more are asked to serve food that has been prepared in a professional kitchen or provided by a caterer.
- j. Best practice would be to serve prepackaged food as much as possible.

4. Building Rentals and Non-Ministry Building Usage

Building usage/rental from outside groups or for non-ministry events is permitted with the following stipulations:

- a. Building usage is limited to groups of 25 or less.
- b. Groups need to follow the same recommendation as specified in Section VI. 2. *Meetings and Ministry Events* as well as Section VI. 3. *Food and Beverages*.
- c. Building usage/rental may be permitted on-site on a case-by-case basis as deemed appropriate under the discretion of the staff.

5. On-Site Organized Sports

- a. **Outdoor sporting events and practices (i.e., softball) may resume on site as long as all participants abide by the StaySafe MN COVID-19 Organized Sports Practice and Games Guidance for Youth and Adults (3/14/21).**
- b. **Indoor sporting events and practices are not permitted on site at this time.**

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OFF-SITE MINISTRY EVENTS

1. Life Groups

- a. Life Groups may resume meeting in homes if they wish at the discretion of the Life Group leader and host.**
- b. Life Groups may continue to meet on-site at the church or virtually online if they wish.**