

COVID-19 Safety Plans for Rockton & Sheffield United Churches

The following resources were used to determine provincial and Hamilton Public Health requirements as well as recommendations and guidelines from the Horseshoe Falls Regional Council.

Ministry of Health COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services – Version 2 – Aug. 21, 2020

Emergency Management & Civil Protection Act – Stage3:0.Reg 364/20 – updated Sept. 25/20

Workplace Safety & Preventions Services Guidance on Health and Safety for Places of Worship During COVID-19

Re-Opening Check List for Communities of Faith – Horseshoe Falls Regional Council – June

<https://www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus/workplaces-and-public-places>

Using the Church Buildings

Our buildings were prepared by posting self-assessment posters, providing a Sunday worship attendance record to enable contact tracing with names & phone numbers as well as a sign-in sheet with the same information for those who enter the buildings through out the week. Contact sheets will be kept for 30 days. To ensure 2 metre spacing, posters were placed about the buildings, directional arrows were marked on floors, areas were blocked off and pew were marked off to ensure social distancing. Exterior doors were clearly marked for entry and exit to encourage suitable traffic flow. Kitchens were marked off to prevent entry. Washrooms were posted with signs regarding handwashing & using paper towel to touch doorknobs and light switches with wastebaskets placed below the light switch.

Hand sanitizer was placed at all entrances and other useful locations. Masks are required & extra masks are available at the door should someone arrive without a mask. Greeters ensure self assessment, masking, hand sanitizing, and registration on the attendance sheet are completed by all worshippers before entering the sanctuary. An offering plate is also available at the entrance. Worshippers are directed to fill the church from front to back. Wipes are available for the chair lift at Sheffield. If it is necessary to use the washroom during the service, it is expected that following the use of the washroom, one would exit via the exit door outdoors and return to the sanctuary via the door designated for entrance. Ceiling fans will remain off during the pandemic. Weather permitting, a window will be open in the sanctuaries to aid air flow.

As weather permits, the exterior doors will be propped open to limit touching. Capacity at both churches is limited to 30 % which means 40 at Rockton and 50 at Sheffield. Online worship will be continue to be available for anyone desiring to worship from home

We have reviewed all recommendations and restrictions and have found no requirement to block off a walkway to Sheffield washrooms which increases the overflow capacity to 20 to 30 people with social distancing maintained. For anticipated overflow events, a downstairs usher will place chairs as people arrive to maintain social distancing.

It was also found that nothing restricts people from repeating the Lord's Prayer or participating in a responsive reading. Recent studies indicate that 3 days is the normal life of the virus and therefore as our buildings are used mainly on a weekly basis, there is less risk of transmission of the virus on tangible items in the buildings. As microphones are located with proper social distancing, they may be used for congregant participation in services. Seasonal décor for Easter, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, and Christmas and lighting of the Christ candle are not restricted.

Certain practices such as passing the peace, passing an offering plate and singing will not take place. No joint worship services will take place until restrictions regarding capacity are lifted. Government policies will be constantly reviewed for change to these practices.

We have reviewed all recommendations and restrictions and have found no requirement to block off a walkway to Sheffield washrooms or anything that restricts people from repeating the Lord's Prayer or participating in a responsive reading. As microphones are located with proper social distancing and are routinely sanitized by the cleaners, they may be used for congregant participation in services. Seasonal décor for Easter, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day and Christmas as well as the lighting of the Christ candle are not restricted.

Cleaning the Church Building

All hymn books, Bibles, pew cushions, children's books and toys were removed from the sanctuaries to reduce contamination & ensure effective cleaning.

Both churches are cleaned and disinfected prior to Sunday services. Ruth Lee at Rockton and Carolyn Zander at Sheffield are both professional cleaners who have WHMIS training and provide their own disinfectants as approved by Health Canada. They check expiry dates and follow manufacturer's instructions for use to meet COVID-19 sanitization rules. As professionals, they sanitize all door handles, light switches, pens, hand rails, chair lifts, pews - especially pew backs, microphones and audio video equipment, musical instruments, tables, candle lighters, projectors and remotes as well as doing a through cleaning of all washrooms.

Insurance

Don Graham of Dumfries Mutual, the insurance company for both churches, was contacted to see if there was any exclusion for third party legal liability claims alleging negligence for the transmission of infectious diseases. There are no exclusions on our policies and Don was aware of nothing that we as church had to do further other than follow the normal safe practices.

Risk Assessment

An assessment to determine the risk of acquiring COVID-19 by either staff or congregants while in either church was conducted by the current Ministry & Personnel chair, the board chair of Rockton United Church and the board chair of Sheffield United Church. It was determined that there is a low risk of infection after completing a revised Canadian framework which assesses risk along three dimensions and contains potential mitigation measures as a fourth factor.

- 1. Local context** – *defined as the approximate likelihood of the individuals entering the setting being infected with the virus responsible for COVID-19 based on current transmission patterns in the community.*

Risk of community exposure in our churches is low as we are in a rural area with limited access to coffee shops, restaurants and other gathering places. Email communications and churches announcements remind congregants to remain at home and view services online if they are feeling unwell or have potentially been exposed to the virus. As our minister lives in Kitchener and has school aged children, he recognizes the possibility of bringing the virus into our buildings and so is very conscientious about isolating if anyone in his family has been exposed.

- 2. Characteristics of individuals in the setting** – *defined as the vulnerability of people in a setting to experience more severe COVID-19 disease or outcomes, whether individuals in the setting are essential workers, and whether individuals in the setting have travelled from other communities.*

It is readily recognized that the majority of our congregants are senior citizens. No one attends church from a long term care facility or from outside our geographical community. Our seniors take precautions very seriously and do not attend church if they are vulnerable. Many of the younger people are working from home or not attending church if they feel they could transmit the virus from their workplace.

3. Setting characteristics – *defined by the intensity of contact between individuals, the frequency of contact with potentially infectious high-touch surfaces, and the environmental characteristics of the setting (e.g., ability to open windows in a confined setting). Contact intensity further considers the type of contact (close to distant), duration of contact (brief to prolonged) and number of contacts (few to many).*

Our setting characteristics are outlined in the “procedures followed to safely reopen” found at the beginning of this document. As everyone entering our buildings has fully co-operated with wearing a mask, using sanitizer, conducting self-assessing, maintaining social distancing and following the established COVID -19 prevention practices our virus risk is low. Our attendance is well below the recommended 30% capacity and no staff members work in the buildings. Committee or board meetings are limited to 10 people and there are no rental activities at either building. Our buildings are mainly used for weekly services only. Contact tracing lists are strictly maintained. The buildings are thoroughly cleaned with emphasis on high touch points prior to worship each week following public health guidelines.

4. Risk mitigation potential – *defined as the degree to which mitigation measures can be Implemented or activities modified to reduce risk. This dimension considers both the type and number of measures that can be put in place.*

Procedures put in place to safely reopen our buildings and continuing to carefully follow these practices put our congregations at moderate risk of contributing to COVID-19 community transmission. Current board chairs will continue to frequently monitor public health websites for any further required mitigation measures required by the Hamilton health unit or the province of Ontario.

Management of a potential case or exposure of COVID-19

- Direct individual feeling unwell to stay home (if at home) or to go home (if at work), [self-isolate](#) and book [testing](#)

- Workplace has a designated safe isolation area if needed. Ideally the isolation area should have a door and provide a safe space for someone to wait without exposing others prior to returning home.

- [Disinfect](#) areas where the unwell individual was located and any surfaces they may have contacted

- Call Hamilton Public Health Services 905 974 9848 option 4 for further guidance/advice as required

IF CONFIRMED COVID-19 positive case

- Call Hamilton Public Health at 905-974-9848 Option 4 for direction and support. Public Health will help determine if our employee was careful and consistent in using a mask, practicing physical distancing and hand hygiene regularly.
- Keep a list with names and contact information for each person who entered our churches midweek. This list will be ready and made available if requested by Public Health. This information will be kept for at least 30 days.
- The personal health information of any employee with COVID-19 will be kept confidential.
- Employees may return to work after 10 days since the start of their symptoms or, if no symptoms, since the date of their test, as long as they no longer have fever and symptoms are improving or resolved. They do not require a repeat test, or a physician note as a condition of return.

Ongoing checks will be made by the board chairs for updates to directives and memorandums from Public Health Ontario and the Hamilton Public Health Unit websites.

Once this plan has been reviewed and accepted by the joint board of Rockton-Sheffield United Churches, as part of our ongoing communication with membership, an email with document attached will be sent to members and adherants to inform them of practices and protocols that have been put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19.

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Approved by Rockton-Sheffield Joint Board on Dec. 2, 2020