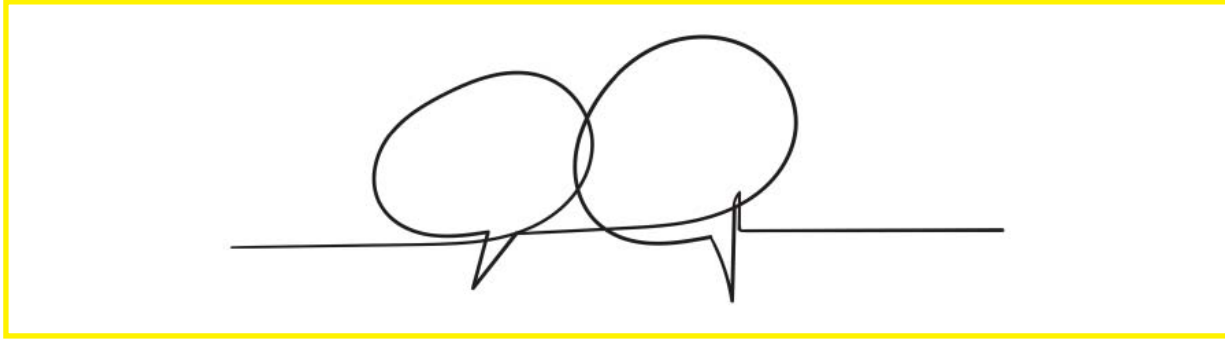


What's your re-entry plan?



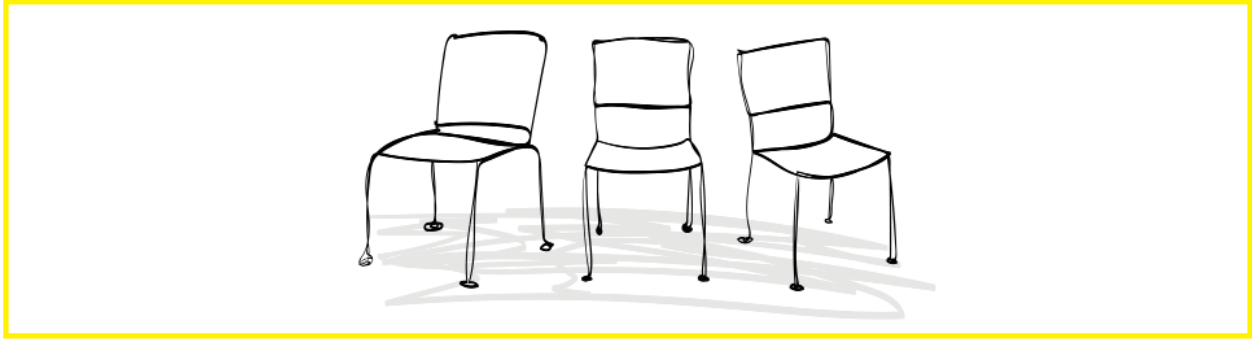
This document is intentionally focussed on Sunday morning face to face gatherings. We believe there is more to the local church than Sunday mornings and we are discussing those topics (*ie what should the church look like in the future, how do we carry on mission post-COVID*) in other venues. That being said, a lot of the questions we are being asked right now have to do with Government restrictions, re-opening phases, and how these impact Sunday morning services. Though this is a global crisis, each local church needs to pay attention to its local realities. It may be that government restrictions loosen up sooner than your church is prepared for, or members of your congregation consider prudent. Given these local realities this note should not be considered a one-size-fits-all solution or “plan” from the FMCIC. What we are providing here are points for your church to consider. If you have any questions or need further help with anything in this document please feel free to contact us. We’re here to help.



Here are some good conversation starters for your leadership team (this is not an exhaustive list):

Strategic Planning

- Are we still in reaction mode or have we begun to think of the future? Does our plan have multiple horizons? Short term, Medium Term, Long Term, and Future?
- How are we doing in ministering:
 - to our members? Do they feel supported?
 - to our community? Have we shown ourselves to be an “essential community service”? Or a “positive community presence”?
 - Beyond? Have we continued to remember our brothers and sisters in other countries (Sri Lanka, Ghana, India, ICCM connections and Tearfund projects)?
- Are we financially healthy? Do we need to engage Sandy Crozier?
- Is our pastor(s) feeling supported and refreshed? What does she/he need to be refreshed?
- Should we form a committee to help us think through these ongoing issues?
- Have we discussed scenarios that involve various possible sizes of gatherings? Several provincial re-opening plans discuss the numbers 15, 30, 50, and 100.
 - should we experiment with hybrid services in which some people meet at home with family, some meet in small groups, and some meet in the sanctuary?
 - how will we adjust the order of service so off-site people feel a part of the service?



Preparing for Sunday

- Have we discussed what we do with scenarios related to the percentage of capacity of seating? For instance, if we are only allowed to be 40% full, what will that look like? Can we maintain physical distancing regulations with the current configuration of our sanctuary?

On Sunday

- Cleaning policies including gathering times: for instance, do we have volunteers ready to: open doors, direct paths, clean handrails, clean doorknobs, squirting hands with sanitizer?
 - How will we manage exits and entrances?
 - What about water fountains?
 - Hymnals?
 - Coffee time? Cookies?
 - What about washrooms: can they reopen? What will need to be in place for them to reopen?
 - What about the offering: can there still be a common plate to pass that everyone touches? What are some alternatives (in Ghana each individual dances their offering up to the front; some of you use an offering box strategically located at the exit doors for people as they leave);
 - Have you discussed worship in music? There are cautions about the potential danger of singing in close proximity, therefore what are the alternatives? Take risks, engage with old and new worship practices as alternatives (silence, lectio divina, dance, kneeling, writing, mouthing words (which many of us do already!), reading songs, etc.
 - How will this impact any prayer times we offer? How will we pray with people at an altar, etc.?



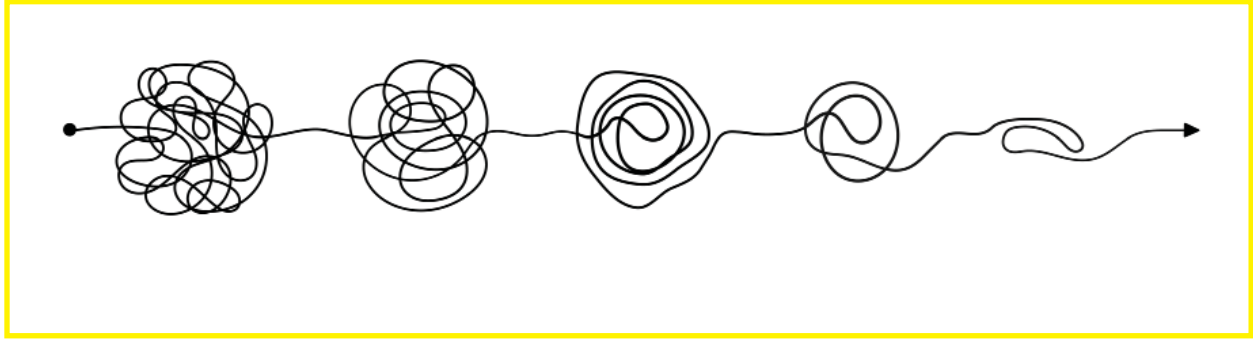
Rest of the Week

- Is our church engaging in church prayer initiatives? In national prayer initiatives?
- What about office hours: should staff continue to be restricted to virtual meetings, and phone calls? For how long?
- Remember that we want to be community-friendly. Make sure that our gatherings will make the news for the right reason!
- Leadership prayer initiatives: fasting, praying, virtual retreats all focused on the future of your local church;
- Small groups: will these depend on numbers? Can they be both virtual and monthly face to face?
- Ongoing congregation support, care, communication and survey.
- What about other programs (youth, etc) and outside user groups? When will they be allowed to resume and under what conditions?



Communicate, communicate, communicate

As your leadership team has these discussions and begins implementation, it is essential that you communicate to your congregation what and why you are doing what you are doing next. We recommend that you assign someone (or a team) the role of communication director in this season. Their job would be to take the leadership decisions and find all kinds of creative ways to get this word out to the congregation. Ever been on a plane ready to take off and the plane doesn't move? Nothing is worse than when the pilot chooses not to inform the passengers about what is happening. It is better to hear that there will be a 20 minute delay due to weather, than to simply hear nothing. It is a strange season, and our church families will roll with the unusual decisions, risks, and plans that we set out, *IF* we explain the whys and whats well and often.



What have we learned?

This pandemic has afforded the church a chance to reconsider and re-evaluate what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. This is a deeply important moment for our future. We can't simply go back to business as usual. Business as usual often meant a declining and disconnected local church. As a denomination we must learn from this experience and prayerfully discern what the Church needs to look like going forward. The National Leadership Team and the Board of Administration are currently engaged in conversations about what the future might look like. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to participate in our ongoing discussions. God has a specific calling for our denomination and we want to walk in that calling together!

The Free Methodist Church in Canada

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