General Considerations

1. Hosting in-person worship services increases a church’s liability; measures to ensure safety and quality control need to be strictly followed and remain consistent.
2. The majority population of our congregation may be considered high risk. High risk individuals are strongly encouraged to continue worshipping remotely.
3. Nancy Harrell has been identified as the COVID-19 Coordinator and is responsible for ensuring the policies and procedures developed by leadership to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are properly put into practice. This role also coordinates supplies and offers ongoing support in the church office, worship services, and other activities.
4. The COVID-19 Coordinator is supported by the COVID-19 Response Team commissioned by the Standing Committee. Team’s purpose is to review the science, data, trends and denominational guidelines and then make recommendations back to the Standing Committee regarding First Congregational Church, UCC, Watertown and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Team will help determine appropriate policies and procedures according to guidelines, and make sure they are consistently followed.
5. The church is responsible to develop, communicate, implement, and enforce this Return to Worship Plan to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
6. Training will be provided to clergy, staff, volunteers, greeters, and ushers on preventing the spread of COVID-19, and this Return to Worship Plan.
7. This Return to Worship Plan will be communicated with our community to alert them of the details about the new policies and requirements. The plan will be posted to our website and a paper copy will be available at the Church.
8. FCC will consult and comply with all local and state guidelines regarding limits on gathering sizes. Currently, religious, spiritual, and worship gatherings are limited to 25% of capacity or up to 100 people indoors, and a maximum of 150 people outdoors. Effective October 8, 2020, religious, spiritual, and worship gatherings are limited to 50% of capacity or up to 200 people indoors, and a 50% capacity outdoors with masks and social distancing required for both indoor and outdoor. Based on the social distancing requirements, seating maps for the main floor and balcony and the mix of families and individuals, the capacity of the sanctuary is estimated to be 50-60 people.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

1. Prior to return of worship services CDC guidelines will be followed. All areas will have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected: shampoo carpets/clean floors; sanitize pews/chairs, bathrooms (floors, sinks, toilets, faucets), doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, phones, microphones, trash receptacles, keyboards, all items in the children’s area, and any other high-touch surfaces. Products that are EPA approved for use against COVID-19 will have been used.
2. A professional cleaning company will perform the cleaning.
3. Staff and volunteers will be relied upon for some cleaning before and after worship. A cleaning plan has been developed for their protection and training has been provided. The cleaning plan also includes the personal protective equipment require for all tasks in the cleaning process, including a protective mask, and disposable gloves/gowns. Cleaning of the registration area and bathroom touch points will be performed before service. All areas utilized during church school and worship will be thoroughly sprayed/disinfected after service.

4. Hand sanitizer is provided in the sanctuary and at all building entrance and exit points.

5. Touchless appliances have been installed in the bathroom in Fellowship Hall.

6. After each gathering, all used areas will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected following CDC guidelines and using products that are EPA approved for use against COVID-19.

7. Religious garments and linens should be washed after each use, at the highest water setting possible. Staff, congregants, and visitors should wear gloves when handling dirty linens.

8. The COVID-19 Coordinator will do a cleaning product inventory check to ensure ordering far enough in advance so that the church does not run out of a necessary product.

Additional Contact Surface Precautions and Engineering Controls

1. Bibles, hymnals and other items frequently found in pews will be kept in storage for now.

2. The sanctuaries air filters have been confirmed to be the highest efficiency possible and modifications have been made to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in worship areas.

Signage

1. Signs highlighting the Church’s new policies and protocols will be posted.

2. Signs will be strategically placed in highly visible locations to remind guests that they should use face coverings and practice physical distancing whenever possible.

Personal Hygiene

1. Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily available.

2. Avoid touching your face.

3. Practice respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.

Health Check

1. If you are having flu like symptoms DO NOT COME TO WORSHIP. People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported, ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus; fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.
2. Each attendee should take their temperature before leaving home. Greeters at the Church will be checking temperatures of each attendant before registration. If temperature is less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, congregant may attend service. A congregant who has a fever at or above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or is experiencing symptoms should NOT attend worship.

3. Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.

4. If someone becomes sick during an event they will be separated into an isolated area in Fellowship Hall and will be asked to leave as soon as possible.

5. A congregant who develops a fever or begins to experience symptoms during worship should immediately go home. If an emergency should occur at the church, follow American Heart Association guidelines for COVID-19 and CPR.

6. In the event of a positive COVID-19 case: members of the clergy, employees, and volunteers should inform their head of the House of Worship and follow state testing and contact tracing protocols.

7. Registration at the door will be required to comply with state contact tracing guidelines.

**Social Distancing**

1. All people except members of the same family shall always remain 6 feet apart.
2. Visual floor markers are used to identify walking flow patterns.
3. Entrance to the sanctuary will be through the door to Fellowship Hall from the parking lot only (the entrance with the ramp).
4. Deacons and greeters will assist in exiting one row at a time at the conclusion of service. Most exits will be out the front doors on both sides.
5. The robing room will be used for staff, and for emergency exit only.
6. Communal gathering areas have been closed off to maintain proper social distancing.
7. Doors will be propped open, if possible, to prevent the need for congregants to touch them.
8. Seating will be reduced to maintain six feet between households attending worship services. Pews have been marked for non-use. Ushers are available to direct people as they arrive and to assist in seating people. A special section for a high-risk population is available.
9. Face coverings for the mouth and nose shall be worn throughout the church.
10. Deacons and ushers will assist with worship dismissal.
11. Families with small children that cannot ensure the ability to maintain proper social distancing are encouraged to attend virtual services.
12. Social gathering inside or on the grounds is discouraged (e.g., parking lot). People are urged to exit promptly after services.
13. The use of nametags will be suspended.
Worship

1. The church will continue to make an on-line worship available. Live streaming and recording of the weekly in-person worship will be made available as soon as practical.
2. Technology will be used to display the service readings and responses. Bulletins will be available in a disposable printed format.
3. Singing is strongly discouraged and will not be part of the worship service. The sanctuary choir will not offer live music as a full choir.
4. Pass the peace in manners that do not require physical contact (no handshakes or hugging). A verbal greeting or other gestures such as a smile or bow are acceptable.
5. Participation at the pulpit by anyone but the minister is suspended unless specifically planned for as part of the worship service.
6. Pre-packaged communion packets will be available for Communion.
7. Offering plates will not be passed through the sanctuary. Offering drop off areas will be provided. On-line giving is also encouraged.

Nursery

There will be no nursery offered at this time.

Christian Education/Church School

1. Upon registration in Fellowship Hall, children will report directly to their classrooms and will not enter the sanctuary unless specifically scheduled to do so.
2. All classrooms have been reconfigured to ensure proper social distancing.
3. Bins to hold materials and individual materials have been purchased for each student. Each student will have these items to use for the entire Church School year.
4. Guidelines for the classrooms have been posted in regard to social distancing, masks, cleaning, etc.
5. Each classroom is equipped with a Cleaning Container which includes extra masks, gloves, paper towels, disinfectant spray, and safety googles.
6. Social distancing and mask signs have been posted in the classroom and hallways along with signs for up staircases and down staircases and directional arrows for going to and leaving classrooms.
7. Each teacher will receive a message that church has concluded and it is safe to dismiss the Children. Children will be dismissed and will meet their parents at the exit in Fellowship Hall.
8. The Rise and Shine area will be off limits for Church use.

Groups and Meetings

1. The Church buildings are closed for meetings of committees and groups (Church related and outside related groups) unless explicitly approved by the COVID-19 Response Team. Any individuals or groups requesting access to Church property shall contact Nancy Harrell.
2. Individuals or groups that will have access to Church property will be required to complete a Release, Consent and Waiver Of Liability and be briefed on this plan.

Other Considerations

1. Attendance for funerals, weddings, support groups, and any other programming will be limited and at the discretion of Rev. Carr and in consultation with the Deacons as necessary. Virtual gatherings are offered as needed.
2. Clergy will hold virtual visits (by phone or online) instead of in homes or at the hospital.
3. Offering food and beverages in a communal gathering pre or post worship will be discontinued. Potlucks or similar family-style eating and drinking events will not be held.
4. Remote meetings via Webex, Zoom, Google, etc. should be used in lieu of in person gatherings as much as practical.
5. Requests for funerals, baptisms and weddings will be handled by Rev. Carr, in consultation with the Deacons as necessary. All services will need to comply with all requirements of this plan, including maximum capacity, registration and social distancing. No receptions or calling hours will be held in the sanctuary or Fellowship Hall. Graveside services are offered as a preferred way to hold a funeral.

Communications:

- Communicate questions and concerns to Nancy Harrell, COVID-19 Coordinator at fccwtn@snet.net or 860-274-6737.

Resources and References:

- The CDC website provides the latest information about COVID-19 transmission: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html
- World Health Organization, www.who.int
- CDC Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith
- CDC Checklist_ Get Your Organization Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019
- CDC Document Outlines Guidance for Reopening of Churches, April 29 2020
- The Partnership Center, COVID-19: Recommended Preventative Practices and FAQs for Faith-based and Community Leaders
- Guidelines-for-Houses-of-Worship
- Insurance Board COVID-19 resources