



# First Congregational Church

*An open and inclusive community of faith.*

## AN UPDATE FROM THE REOPENING COMMITTEE

Thank you to all who responded to our survey regarding reopening. We received 117 responses of which 46 left comments and a number left contact information. Pastor Scott is working on contacting anyone who left their information. Please see below for the results of the survey.

If you are reading this e-newsletter soon after it is released, please take a minute to fill out a [second survey](#) about online services and offerings. We are committed to continue online virtual and recorded services and gatherings on a permanent basis. We plan to continue to develop and improve our online virtual offerings. The deadline to respond is **March 9**.

We all are hoping and praying that circumstances will permit in-person activities at some point in the near future. We are committed to continue online virtual and recorded services and gatherings on a permanent basis. In the interest of improving and evolving our virtual church offerings we ask for some input into the level of interest and participation of the congregation.

The ROC was formed in the summer of 2020. Originally there were four of us and we met in person (outside) once and a couple times via Zoom. In January of 2021, the ROC added 5 new members, including Pastor Scott. Having new members and pastoral input is extremely beneficial to the mission and goals of the ROC.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches, a network of Christian churches and faith-based organizations, held a webinar on January 14 called "Holding Our Plans Loosely - Returning to Church 2.0". This webinar is available on their website for anyone interested in viewing. It is just over 60 minutes long. ([www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org))

The ROC is using these recommendations as our basis for deciding when and how to open. The Wisconsin Council of Churches laid out 3 levels of activity. "Unsafe to Gather", "Make it Safer", and "Safest". Within each category there is criteria regarding vaccination rates, cases per 100K and positive tests. We are using data published by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. As of February 25, 2021, the combined data puts us just below the "Make it Safer" category.

The church building has been closed to the public since the middle of March 2020 but has never been completely shut down. Business operations have continued throughout thanks to our dedicated staff.

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*(Reopening, continued...)*

Port Pre-School closed in the spring but resumed operation in the Fall of 2020. They have instituted rules and cleaning protocols specific to their needs. An attorney drafted indemnification documents for the church which the school agreed to and signed.

Where are we right now? The building is still closed to the public. Virtual services will continue and will be a permanent part of our church offerings. Musicians having been adding to those services and that will continue and expand gradually. Special functions will take place only with prior approval, on a case-by-case basis, with the following considerations:

- Number in attendance should be 10 or less.
- Which space is being utilized?
- What is the duration of the function? Less than 30 minutes is recommended.
- Can it be scheduled separately to avoid overlap with any other function?
- Social distancing and masks will be required.

What does the future hold? First, all plans depend on a continued downward trend in COVID-19 infection rates. Any new surges will result in a fall back of activities until the downward trend is re-established. We are all hoping and praying that circumstances will permit in-person gatherings and worship at some point in the coming months. Unfortunately, that will not happen by Easter. In-person small group bible study is likely to be the first step, some time after April 4th. It will be limited to 10 or less each time, will be held in Fellowship Hall, following safety protocols. Based on the survey results, there will be focus on outdoor services when weather permits.

The ROC is considering many things as we look to the future, including capacity for safe distancing, traffic patterns, cleaning protocols, air filtration. The safety of all, especially the most vulnerable among us, is our top priority. Singing will be one of the last things to return.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches published their "Notes on Theology, Ethics and Values".

- Prioritize protecting the life and health of your neighbor.
- Let yourself continue to be provoked by holy experiments.
- Follow the call to love and good deeds, urgently and carefully.
- Prioritizing accessibility honors the diversity and one-ness of Christ's church.
- Take seriously the church's role as community leader.
- Believe in the resilience of the church.

Looking forward to a time we can all be together again,

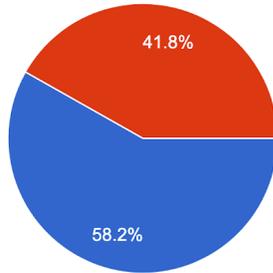
Phil Stepanski

First Congregational Church Reopening Committee Chair  
and Associate Moderator on the Church Council

# Reopening Survey Results – February 2021

If First Congregational Church began to hold in-person small group gatherings in Fellowship Hall, limited to 10, with proper social distancing and masking.

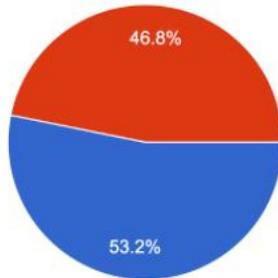
110 responses



- Yes, I would attend that event.
- No, I would not attend that event.

If First Congregational Church held drive-thru Communion distribution.

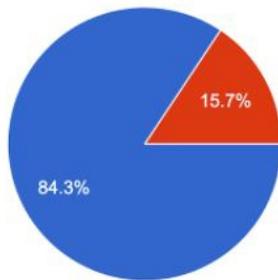
111 responses



- Yes, I would attend that event.
- No, I would not attend that event.

If First Congregational Church held in-person outdoor services (weather permitting).

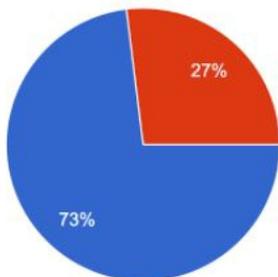
115 responses



- Yes, I would attend that event.
- No, I would not attend that event.

If First Congregational Church held in-person church services by appointment to limit attendance.

115 responses



- Yes, I would attend that event.
- No, I would not attend that event.