



Q. The Quebec government announced the reopening of places of worship starting June 22, 2020. Can we open our church for regular worship at this time?

A. The United Church of Canada recommends a gradual opening for all its communities of faith (COF). The Conseil régional Nakhonha:ka Regional Council Executive passed a motion on June 18, 2020 recommending that COF open for worship **no earlier than Labour Day weekend**.

Q. What does that mean – a gradual opening?

A. The United Church of Canada has established a protocol in which there are two initial phases; **Phase 1** is for opening church buildings to staff and church councils, and small groups for meetings etc. During this phase all preparations can be made to ready the church building for worship. **Phase 2** consists of opening for worship, weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Q. Are there any guidelines or rules that must be followed?

A. Yes. Both the Government of Quebec and the Regional Council have similar protocols that must be followed. COF should review the guidelines provided and prepare plans to reopen the church buildings using the Regional Council COVID-19 Task Group **protocol checklist** as a guide. (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>)

Once plans have been finalized and approved by your local church council, you are asked to submit these plans to Regional Council via Brian Ruse (Bruse@united-church.ca).

Q. What will Regional Council do with these plans?

A. Representatives from the COVID-19 Response Task Group will review the plan and advise if there is concurrence with the assessment made by your local church council to reopen for each phase of the plan.



Q. Can we open the building now?

A. Regional Council expects each COF to submit a Phase 1 plan prior to opening the building.

Q. How do we support pastoral concerns about the more vulnerable members of our communities of faith during the re-opening process?

Through faithful discernment, each community of faith is called to consider the most vulnerable members of their community---including their tenants, renters, ministry personnel and staff---and to implement the necessary safeguards that will protect the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of all.

Q. What if the government already authorized our tenants to reopen as they are deemed an essential service?

A. First, it is important to understand that each COF determines who uses the building, when, and under what terms and conditions. The government has no authority over your building in these matters. As such, it is requested that a Phase 1 Plan be submitted as soon as possible paying attention to the section for tenants.

Please note we will be making a standard lease override memo available to be signed by tenants and the church during the pandemic.

Q. What does the plan look like and how do we submit it?

A. The plan can be submitted using the **protocol checklist** that has been made available on the Regional Council web site (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>).

The checklist outlines all of the guidelines and protocols required for each COF to follow. Simply submit the checklist with any notations, dates, names, and status and that will suffice.

You may submit a plan for Phase 1&2 together or individually if that would meet the needs of the COF. Please include the motion from your church council approving the plan and submit to the COVID-19 Response Task Group via Brian Ruse (Bruse@united-church.ca).



Q. Is it a legal requirement to follow these protocols?

A. Yes. It is a legal requirement to comply with government guidelines, as well any insurance requirements should a claim situation arise.

Q. Will financial assistance be available for COF during the pandemic crisis?

A. Please contact Brian Ruse (BRuse@united-church.ca) to inquire about loans for financial assistance.

Q. What about cleaning / disinfecting -are there guidelines and approved cleaning / disinfecting products? Who is responsible for cleaning / disinfecting? How much will it cost?

A. Cleaning and disinfecting protocols must be maintained once the building is reopened. Particular attention must be put on washrooms, surfaces and high touch areas in the space used during reopening. As the **protocol checklist** suggests, it would be more economical to use as little space as possible and to open only when required so that the frequency of cleaning / disinfecting is minimized.

As the cleaning / disinfecting protocols are there to protect congregants, visitors and staff, there is no difference for small or large churches- protocols must be implemented.

Please see the **protocol checklist** for links to cleaning /disinfecting instruction and products (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>).

Q. Who will do all this cleaning / disinfecting?

A. For COF without cleaning services, arrangements will have to be made to train volunteers or procure the necessary services or hire staff to ensure the protocols are met. Please note that employers are responsible to ensure SIMDUT (WHMIS) regulations are followed, including employee training for chemical handling, protective equipment, container labeling, chemical inventory etc. WHMIS training is available online.



Q. Can the Regional Council purchase and distribute supplies to communities of faith?

A. The Regional Council does not have the necessary skills and resources for bulk procurement and distribution of supplies. Cleaning supplies are available from distributors throughout Quebec and masks are readily available. Please check Buying United to see if there are savings that may be available to your community of faith (<https://buyinunited.net/covid-19>).

Q. Can we ask tenants to pay extra for cleaning / disinfecting?

A, It is recommended that any additional costs for tenant occupancy be negotiated with the tenants. The landlord has a responsibility to meet cleaning / disinfecting protocols in common space.

The Regional Council has requested that each COF provide an estimate of additional costs for cleaning /disinfecting.

Please review the internet links in the revised **protocol checklist** for additional information (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>).

Q. What about insurance and legal obligations for a COF during this pandemic crisis?

A. Please follow the guidelines issued by UCC and the regulatory requirements of Government of Quebec. It is important to document your plan and monitor its implementation to ensure that due diligence has been performed. It is important that government regulations be followed to avoid unwanted consequences such as fines or closure.

Insurance policies require policyholders to comply with the law.

It is recommended to check the building weekly and document that you have completed a walk through.

Q. How is building access controlled?

A. Please refer to the **protocol checklist** (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>). It is recommended to maintain a single point of entry, have key control and implement a registry so

that it is known who is in the building for security reasons and who has been in the building for tracing reasons.

Long term in larger facilities it may be appropriate to consider a controlled access system (CAS). For emergency purposes, it is good practice at all times to know who is in the building.

Phase 1 will provide access for small groups to enter the building; the issue becomes even bigger as the building is opened for worship.

Q. How should a COF proceed with rental relationships?

A. Please refer to the **protocol checklist** (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>). Tenant agreements should be negotiated and redocumented to cover the additional costs of access and cleaning / disinfecting. As well, tenants should be made aware of the church guidelines when in the common space in the building and agree to the terms and conditions of these guidelines. Since these are legal requirements, the seriousness of these required changes must be expressed.

It is not recommended that tenants undertake cleaning / disinfecting protocols for any common space; however they are responsible for implementing cleaning / disinfecting protocols in the space rented. It is the responsibility of the building owner to clean / disinfect common space.

It is a good practice for a building owner to ensure that tenants are using the space as the lease indicates and that the tenant meets government regulations. In this case, ensure that the tenant is aware and implements guidelines for its sector of activity.

If negotiation cannot bring about a satisfactory arrangement for this new reality for both parties, consideration should be given to cancellation of the agreement.

Please note we are making available a standard lease override memo to be signed by tenants and the Church during the pandemic.

Q. I have some questions and concerns about worship, masks, physical distancing and outdoor worship. Can you elaborate?

A. Please follow the guidelines provided for access, masks, social distancing, capacity, music, offering and communion. Sanctuaries will have to be marked with indicators for seating. Entrance and exit plans should be made available.



COF are responsible for the procurement of masks and distribution should individuals require one upon entry. Hand sanitizer must be provided.

The government is limiting gatherings to 50 people practicing appropriate social distancing. Should the demand exceed that number a COF may consider a reservation approach, having two services or dividing congregation into groups of members alternating attendance every two weeks as options.

A screening process is required as individuals enter the building for worship and extreme care should be taken for the elderly who have chosen to attend.

Please note that all children's activity will require following government guidelines for daycares.

For gathering outdoors please consult the government guidelines for maximum allowable participation, masks, social distancing requirements. Consider how this can be executed without access to the building for chairs and other necessities such as access to washrooms.

Q. Are we moving our community of faith online? Is this a new digital reality?

A. Individual COF will be in a better position to examine these questions that deal with on-line access, the benefits and issues concerning continuing on-line worship, providing on-line worship to parts of the community and physical worship to those who prefer. Building and maintaining faithful and strong relationship with community in both environments will be a challenging opportunity.

There will be ongoing questions / discussions regarding Wi-Fi access, devices, training, parallel delivery on-line and in the sanctuary, as well as potential financial assistance for those who require it.

Q. Where will current information be posted?

A. The latest planning information and Regional Council communication is available on the website in the COVID-19 resources section (<https://nakonhakaucc.ca/resources/covid-19/>) and in particular, on the page about re-opening protocols (<https://bit.ly/COVID19-ReOpeningProtocols-web>).



Regular updates are also posted on the Facebook group and page, as well as through special announcements and bi-weekly newsletters emailed to the entire Regional Council mailing list. Printed documents have also been sent to all pastoral charges.

The Task Group is also available to answer questions, so please submit them to BRuse@united-church.ca

Q. What about large events, tourists, concerts, fund-raising activities and such?

A. This is **Phase 3** activity and the Task Group will communicate information at the appropriate time. Until then, government protocols limit gatherings to certain types of activity, for a maximum of 50 people following social distancing.