

Update August 11, 2021:

The St. John's Safe Operating Task Force has met to recommend protocols for St. John's members and building users during this time of high community transmission. While the risks for vaccinated persons remain low, we are mindful of families of children who cannot be vaccinated yet, as well as the immunocompromised and those yet unvaccinated. Our recommendations are based on:

1. The CDC's recommendation is that all persons in communities with substantial transmission wear face masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status, in public settings.
2. The Northfield Public Schools' requirement is that all persons wear face masks in school buildings beginning August 11.
 - o For Children and Youth programming, St. John's will be following the Northfield School Districts COVID-19 protocols. Masks will be required for all participants. We will seek to be outside as much as possible or in a large room setting. Air purifiers will be used in indoor gathering spaces and we are asking volunteers to be vaccinated. Please feel free to call or email the church if you have any questions or concerns.

Our guidelines at St. John's will be as follows:

1. Face masks will be required indoors for worship, when moving about the building, and for any gathering of more than 10 people.
2. If in a small gathering of 10 or fewer, everyone is vaccinated, and everyone agrees, face masks may be removed during activity that stays within one room. Group members should put masks back on when moving about the building or using the restrooms. Groups should mask if one member expresses the need for caution.
3. If a group is singing, face masks should be worn throughout the time the group is in that room.
4. Adults volunteering with children's and youth programming will be required to affirm they are vaccinated.
5. If an activity involves eating and drinking, food should be served by designated persons. Face masks may be removed when a person is seated and eating or drinking.
6. Outdoor activity will not require masks. Groups are encouraged to take advantage of our outdoor spaces, including the courtyard and the covered entrance to the Commons.

We know that the case counts in Rice County will fluctuate, that it takes some time to make necessary changes, and that it is frustrating to have to remake plans. So we will begin planning changes once case counts have fallen below the threshold for 2 consecutive weeks, or right away if the CDC changes its guidance.

Update August 1, 2021:

Due to substantial community infection rates in Rice and Dakota Counties, the CDC recommends that all persons -- whether vaccinated or not -- wear masks in public settings. We will require face coverings in worship until further notice.

We will provide a section of pews in worship that are spaced for those who wish to seat themselves with a little more space between others.

Holy Communion will be offered outside on Sunday, August 8 following both the 9 and 10:30 services.

Further updates about programming and other building protocols will be communicated later next week after our Safe Operating task force meets again.

Update June 28, 2021:

This month, our Safe Operating Committee recommended and the Church Council affirmed that we take the next steps in returning to a more normal worship pattern. Lower infection rates along with robust vaccination rates in our congregation lead us to believe that we can take these steps to encourage everyone to return to in-person worship.

Beginning June 28, 2021:

1. We will continue with two services at 9 and 10:30, open to everyone without registration.
2. All pews will be available for seating. Ushers can help you find a seat at some distance from others if that is your preference.
3. Masks will be optional for vaccinated persons in our Sunday worship. Infection rates have fallen to a level where we now feel that it rests with individuals to decide whether to mask for their own protection or not. Unvaccinated persons should still wear a mask.
4. We will allow singing together.
5. We will share the peace in a way that respects one another's wishes for contact.
6. We will continue to encourage social conversations outside.

We recognize that there are many reasons one might still wear a mask – because you are not yet vaccinated because you are vaccinated but immunocompromised because you are simply more comfortable wearing a mask, or for a sense of solidarity with a family member who still needs to mask. We know that our congregation will be respectful of these individual circumstances and at the same time want to celebrate that the pandemic has waned enough that many of us can gather unmasked.

We hope you will return to worship in person, even though the new options for accessing worship remotely will continue. The summer worship schedule at 9 and 10:30 will continue until after Labor Day. We hope to resume Holy Communion on Sundays on August 1.

The church is open for summer office hours. The office will be staffed Monday-Friday from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Phones will be answered from 2-5 as well, and the building will be accessible by appointment at other times.

GROUPS may schedule events in the church building, following current CDC guidelines which recommend masks for all unvaccinated persons. Please contact the church office for **any** building use.

The SAFE OPERATING TASK FORCE is continuing to recommend safety protocols as we re-open. Pastor Pam Fickenschler, Pastor Jonathan Davis, President-Elect Ruth Dahl, Dr. Rod Christensen, Leah Garlie, Nathan Proctor, and Paul Beck meet regularly to help the Church Council and staff plan for ministry in the weeks and months ahead. Members should be prepared to continue the changes in how we do ministry. Click here to read our [Principles for Safe Operating](#).

Please continue to guard the health and safety of others. Remember as you interact in person with others that anyone can spread the virus unknowingly. Wash your hands frequently, and if you have any symptoms, please stay home from in-person activities.

Vaccines are available for all ages 12 and up locally and throughout the state. Currently, the best way to schedule a vaccine is through your local health care provider. For your information, here is a link for the Minnesota Department of Health's vaccine finder in Minnesota. <https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/find-vaccine/locations/index.jsp>

Ways to Stay Connected with St. John's

- **Listen on KYMN Radio: 95.1 FM/ 1080 AM (kymnradio.net) to the worship service on Sundays.** (9:00 AM) The bulletins will be available online and can be accessed on our homepage.
- **Livestream Video of Sunday Services.** Sunday services are livestreamed and linked in on our homepage. Audio recording of the sermons will be archived [under the Worship tab](#) of the website.
- **Audio of sermons and worship videos** are posted of each Sunday's worship later in the week. You can listen to a large audio archive of sermons on your phone via the SoundCloud application.
- **RADIO and Livestream WORSHIP** every Sunday at 9 a.m.
- **Preschool through Grade 5** have summer outdoor activities coming up. Contact Julie Brehmer at children@StJohsNorthfield.org to receive weekly updates on children's ministry.
- **Middle and High School youth** have finished their official program year but are continuing to meet with outdoor gatherings and service projects. Space is still available for a summer canoe trip. Contact youth@StJohnsNorthfield.org to receive details on upcoming events.

How Can You Help?

This question continues to be asked every day. It's heartening to know that we have a community that is ready to step up in a crisis.

- First and foremost, stay safe and follow state guidelines for distancing. Connect with neighbors and friends and support each other remotely.
- St. John's continues to need your **regular financial gifts**. Although we can't be with you all in person, we want to continue to pay our staff. [Give online here](#). Or mailed offerings will continue to be welcomed. If you are in a position to pay ahead on your annual

pledge, that will also help us get through this difficult time. Contact Leah Garlie at 507-645-4429 if you would like to set-up automatic online giving.

- Our Sunday School's **Blessing Box** is seeing a high level of both donations and people receiving these blessings. Nonperishable foods, cleaning supplies, feminine hygiene supplies, and toilet paper are especially welcome donations.
- The **Red Cross** still needs blood, maybe now more than ever. Go to the Red Cross website at redcross.org if you are eligible to donate. Drives are still happening locally, including at St. John's.
- The **Community Action Center** is experiencing a high demand for assistance, especially for housing assistance. The quickest way to help is to donate financially. The CAC can make those gifts go further than your own grocery store donations. They are also building their volunteer base. [For more information visit their website.](#)