

Moving Forward: Reopening Fairlawn Fairlawn Governing Council Update @ June 11, 2020

The Government of Ontario has begun to allow businesses and institutions to reopen. This week, it stated that faith communities – churches, synagogues, and mosques – can reopen later this week if they limit attendance to 30% of the building capacity and practice physical distancing.

There is some confusion as to what the 30% refers to and whether this reopening applies to Toronto as the province rolls out its gradual, staged reopening. Fairlawn's Governing Council is examining how this will impact when we can gather again at our church as well as when our community partners (renters) can use our church space again.

Fairlawn Today

The past three months have been an ordeal. We have scrambled, adapted, and learned – but also experienced an epiphany. We have found solutions outside of our usual “operating sphere”. We have supported more people than ever through Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and beyond through prayer, reflection, music, and a sense of on-line connection that is beyond what any of us thought possible. We have also continued to explore “life’s big (and small) questions”. Even while learning, we have been reminded of the importance of our core values, regardless of how they are offered.

Fairlawn's Reopening Principles

Fairlawn's Governing Council established a reopening task group in April. It has been doing the planning we need in order to reopen for our congregants and community partners. The task group is now advising our Governing Council on our next steps as information unfolds.

We believe Fairlawn should not necessarily follow the same reopening guidelines as other businesses and institutions. We recognize that reopening our church is different. The three principles that we're building our reopening on are:

- 1) We want to open **safely**. Churches are primarily built on trust. People expect church leaders to make healthy, informed decisions, and people will remain connected with churches based on trust and a feeling of safety, rather than how quickly they reopen. We will carefully consider the benefits and challenges of reopening. We will also continue to follow – and exceed – public health guidelines, especially for vulnerable communities. That means limiting the size of gatherings and ensuring proper cleaning practices, social distancing, and wearing masks. Safely reopening will be accompanied by a commitment to being a culture that asks: “How can we prevent someone else getting sick?”

- 2) We want to open **faithfully**. We need to reflect Fairlawn's' values even as we continue to ask ourselves what creative methods, we can use to meet our

community's needs for worship, spiritual reflection, and online learning and discussion.

Midway through this crisis, we received our community research results, which are also beginning to inform our thinking. The research raised the importance – to both congregants and non-congregants – of:

- belonging, having a sense of community, and feeling supported;
- making meaning of life and spirituality, and having a desire to consider “life’s big questions”; and
- having adult learning opportunities on a wide variety of subjects.

We have learned that both groups also want more online offerings, which we have begun to offer, and which have been well received. We are also continuing to explore “life’s big (and small) questions”. We are evaluating the lessons we are learning from this pandemic and how we can improve our offerings to provide people with more life, hope, and faith.

- 3) We need to be **prudent financial stewards**, while not allowing finances to drive our reopening timing. We are pursuing all opportunities for government financial support, but we are not “a business”. Reopening may mean that our finances will improve, but this could also be more influenced by economic factors, such as families reprioritizing their budget during this uncertain time. Reopening to our community partners might provide revenue, but complicate how we safely reopen to our congregation, so we are balancing all of this.

Fairlawn’s Next Steps

We will continue to be a faith community, even though we cannot return to the church as it was. That’s not possible – or responsible. Instead, we will find a new church model that welcomes and engages people. We may have to incorporate new technologies and approaches, but we will continue to ensure that Fairlawn continues to meet regularly.

We must also acknowledge, and express, the loss and grief that we have experienced for what “was” even while we celebrate the church that we are becoming. Fairlawn has not closed. It has always been the people, not just the building. We will continue to gather virtually, and remain focused on *being* church and not just *going* to church. We will take time to adapt and innovate, and reopen safely and faithfully. We will also balance our financial obligations against this backdrop, even as we learn about the science of how the virus spreads to help us identify, and implement, the best practices for Fairlawn.

We know we need to communicate clearly and often as that builds trust. We will share our guidelines for reopening our building later in the summer. But, this is not a race to reopen. Our faith and values will guide us as we make space to truly hear, individually and collectively, from our God who is faithful – no matter when we are able to reopen.

Check Shining Waters’ Moving Forward: Living Faithfully recommendations:
<https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Moving-Forward-Living-Faithfully.pdf>