

Guidelines for Returning to In-Person Gatherings

This is a living document. If we have learned one thing, things will change. We will review and may update our guidelines to reflect updated information.

On March 17, 2020 we stopped all in-person gatherings due to COVID-19, in accordance with government and ELCA guidance. While our building has remained closed to in-person gatherings, Faith was never closed. We remained open with online and at home worship and online ministries. Then we moved forward with outdoor in-person gatherings in August.

While we miss being in person indoors, we are expanding our ministry. We have brought the gospel of Jesus to 200 viewers with online worship each week. We have had neighborhood visitors drop in to the outdoor worship.

But, when will we gather in person again indoors?

We have learned a lot over the past 6 months. We know we will be living with the risk of COVID-19 for some time. We know that the risk is reduced by consistently following health department precautions. So, we have updated our guidelines and are ready to begin indoor worship and gatherings in October (in addition to at home, online, and outdoor alternatives).

While in the building we will continue to follow precautions. We will maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet. We will wear face coverings. We will keep our hands clean. We will use sign-ups for contact tracing.

We respect the harsh reality of this virus that has killed so many. If you are high risk, experience any symptoms of COVID-19, or just don't feel comfortable coming back in person, then we encourage to stay home and join us online or with at home materials. Don't worry, we will save a seat for you when the time is right for you to return.

Please review our updated, simplified guidelines for more information. As always, your feedback and questions are welcome by contacting the church.

Thank you,

Congregation Council

COVID-19 Sub-Committee: Pastor Carrie, Mike Garner, Linda Golinghorst, Gary King, Amy Murray, Matt Peck, Joni Schneider, and Lisa Garner as advisor

Our return to in person gatherings will take place in phases:

- Phase 0. No in person gatherings
- Phase 1. In-person gatherings outdoors with precautions
- Phase 2. In-person gatherings outdoors and indoors with precautions
- Phase 3. Return to (new) normal without precautions

We will monitor health department guidelines, COVID-19 trends and our use of precautions and process changes to inform our decisions. Once we reach a given phase, we may return to a prior phase if there is a need to reduce the risk. We will not have in-person gatherings indoors if the local schools are closed due to COVID-19. We will not have in-person gatherings indoors if the local hospitals stop or greatly reduce elective procedures. We will communicate any changes through mail, email, facebook, outdoor sign and our website.

For in person gatherings during phases 1 and 2:

We will follow cleaning guidelines from the health department. If a person who tests positive was in our building, we will immediately shut down the building and consult the health department guidelines on cleaning and reopening.

We will take the following precautions:

- Maintain at least 6' physical distance
- Wear face coverings
- Keep hands clean
- Record who was at in-person events for contact tracing
- Stay home if you or anyone in your household is ill
- Stay home if you are in the vulnerable population
- Stay home if you are quarantined due to COVID-19 exposure or positive test

We will make the following process changes:

- Signs posted with precautions
- Worship sign-up and check-in
- Schedule gatherings with church office
- Mark seating areas for physical distancing
- Usher people in and out
- Face coverings, offering collection, disposable gloves, etc., at entrance
- No group singing and limited group speaking
- No touch passing of the peace
- Remove items from pews and other areas
- Limited access inside building
- No food service, coffee service
- Water fountains not available

Leaders of any in-person gatherings are responsible to communicate precautions and process changes and to make sure they are followed. If participants are not willing to follow precautions and process changes, the leader will stop the in-person gathering and excuse participants immediately.

For church business during phases 0-2:

We will follow cleaning guidelines from the health department. If a person who tests positive was in our building, we will immediately shut down the building and contact the health department for guidance on cleaning and reopening. If an employee or volunteer is exposed, they must quarantine following health department guidelines and may not return without healthcare approval.

We will take the following precautions:

- Maintain at least 6' physical distance
- Wear face coverings
- Keep hands clean
- Record who was in the building for contact tracing
- Stay home if you or anyone in your household is ill
- Stay home if you are in the vulnerable population
- Stay home if you are quarantined due to COVID-19 exposure or positive test

We will make the following process changes:

- Temperature check and COVID-19 symptom survey upon entry
- Doors will be locked, call ahead for visits
- Clean commonly used areas daily
- Staff trained on guidelines and facility restrictions
- Hand sanitizer, face coverings, etc., at entrance
- No food service, coffee service
- Water fountains not available
- Limited access inside building

Leaders of any in-person gatherings are responsible to communicate precautions and process changes and to make sure they are followed. If participants are not willing to follow precautions and process changes, the leader will stop the in-person gathering and excuse participants immediately.

Further Clarifications:

- Face coverings that are recommended by the CDC are required, i.e. not gators or shields.
- Employees, volunteers and visitors must check for elevated temperature and COVID-19 symptoms before coming on-premise.
- Food and drink are not allowed during in-person gatherings indoors.
- Hand sanitizer will be made available at all times for church business and during in-person gatherings.
- Floor markings will be used and chairs will be removed or marked as 'do not use' to help enforce physical distancing.
- We may reduce the number of people who gather in person, as needed, to respond to the risk of community spread.
- We may reduce the amount of time that we gather in person, as needed, to respond to the risk of community spread.
- We may reduce the amount of group speaking at in-person gatherings, as needed, to respond to the risk of community spread.
- We will improve indoor ventilation by opening windows, doors and/or using air purifiers.
- We may use a bigger room, as needed, to reduce risk by increasing the ratio of air volume to the number of people.

Approved Exceptions:

- Employees may remove face coverings temporarily during working hours for essential activities, e.g. eating, drinking.
- A face covering is not required when outdoors with less than 10 people and when physically distanced at least 10 ft apart.
- Face coverings may be removed just before taking communion and must be replaced immediately afterwards.
- During baptism, the Pastor may be closer than 6 ft while pouring water and/or anointing.
- During online recordings, one or two people may sing with face coverings and while physically distanced as far as is feasible, and with agreement from all others in the room.
- During online recordings, an individual may play a brass/wind instrument without a face covering while physically distanced as far as is feasible, and with agreement from all others in the room.

FAQs

What is the process we will use to move between phases?

The COVID-19 sub-committee will oversee execution and revision of these guidelines. They will make recommendations to council for approval. Council will have final authority over moving between phases and guideline revisions.

How will we know when the church is transitioning to a new phase?

When we are ready to move from one phase to another, we will send a letter to the congregation. Included in that letter will be a reminder of what safety measures are being taken and what is open during that phase. Other methods of communication will also be used, e.g. Ambassador, website, facebook, outdoor sign, etc.

Who is included in the 'vulnerable' population?

Members of the vulnerable population include older adults (65 and older) and people of any age with an underlying medical condition. For more specific information, use the following link to the CDC's description of people who are high risk and please be sure to check with your doctor if you are unsure.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

Why do we need to sign up for worship? How do we sign up for worship?

In order to maintain physical distancing, the capacity of the worship space is reduced. We use the sign-up to help us anticipate spacing and to keep records of attendance for contact tracing in case of an exposure. There will be online and call-in options to sign up for worship.

What does physical distancing mean?

Most people say social distancing, but we mean the physical distance between people that are together in-person according to the CDC. The minimum distance is 6 feet, but it varies according to the activity.

Why can't we sing or have spoken congregational liturgy?

Singing and spoken congregational liturgy is considered a super spreading activity which means increased risk of spreading the virus.

Will face coverings be available for worshipers?

We expect worshipers to bring their own face coverings. However, we will try to have a limited supply of face coverings on hand.

Are there any exceptions to the face coverings requirement?

Per the CDC guidelines, there are exceptions for children under the age of two, anyone who has trouble breathing, and anyone who is unable to remove the face coverings without assistance.

What are the guidelines for weddings and funerals?

Weddings and funerals follow the same guidelines as worship.

How is the NS Food Pantry affected by our guidelines?

The NS Food Pantry is a separate entity with a separate entrance in our building. We will inform them of any COVID-19 cases in our building, and ask them to do the same.

References and Resources

CDC information for schools and childcare

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html#thresholds>

Video from the Minneapolis Synod with Epidemiologist, Dr. Michael Osterholm

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/yvJnBay3qE1JZaPk70yGaJwnJ7rDeaa81XIY_alLzBqWLs-CBXFylAKROVXGIFJUT

Guidelines and Recommendations from the WI Council of Churches

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>

IA Guidelines for Faith Based Org

<https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/61/covid19/Guidance%20-%20Religious%20Facilities%20and%20Places%20of%20Worship.pdf>

IL Guidelines for Faith Based Org

<https://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/wandtv.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/8/71/871b133a-8b2a-11ea-86f9-5790e31499a0/5eab44bf2750a.pdf.pdf>

Letter from SE IA Synod Bishop Burk

<https://app.robly.com/archive?id=c855f04d7d8d4ee68aedf7e090dabc9d&v=true>

CDC Guidelines:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

White House and CDC Guidelines for Open Up America Again:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>

Singing during the pandemic - American Choral Directors Association:

<https://acda.org/resources-for-choral-professionals-during-a-pandemic/>

Methodist Guidelines - Similar to WI Council of Churches

<https://www.iaumc.org/newsdetail/iowa-annual-conference-of-the-united-methodist-church-crisis-response-re-entry-plan-13653399>