

Protocols for Moving Forward under the Pandemic Restrictions Message to the Congregation

We ask for God's Guidance

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship pg. 317)

The Change We are Facing

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted our church family in many ways. One of the biggest impacts is the suspension of in-person worship and other congregational activities. As the state of Ohio experiences a gradual, responsible return to typical operations, the recommendations from both civic and religious leaders include development of thoughtful plans that consider appropriate level of concern for the health and safety of all our sisters and brothers in Christ. Current predictions include a projection that we will need to continue to adjust operations for another 12-18 months. And we must be prepared to adapt quickly as the pandemic rapidly changes as the situation unfolds. Here at Grace Lutheran Church we have assembled a Reopening Task Force to prayerfully and planfully manage the relaunch of in-person services as soon as it is safe to do so.

Our Response to Date in Engaging the Parish

In response to COVID-19, we've made tremendous strides in providing remote ways to continue connecting and growing as a congregation. From streaming worship on Facebook to conducting Bible Studies and Church Council meetings on Zoom, the crisis has pushed us to exercise our creativity in wonderful ways. Recent worship services alone have reached 800+ individuals... spreading the good news of Jesus Christ across the airwaves and beyond the bounds of our physical community. Mailings to members who are not web-connected also extend our reach and provide for continuous connection. We also have added Drive-In Church at St. John's parking lot. What a glorious gift to be able to spread the gospel in new and virtually limitless ways!

Looking Ahead and Moving Forward in a Safe Manner

We have determined that it is most prudent to keep the church building closed through June. It is our intention to continue to watch the trajectory of cases in Ohio and we would hope to see a 14 day downward trajectory in cases before we even think about opening the facility. This plan aligns with the recommendations made by the Federal Task Force as a best practice.

We have reviewed our insurance coverage with our representative. While we can always be sued, there would need to be proof that the Church was acting in a negligent manner. Our representative believes that, with the measures we intend to implement, our policy would assist in the event we were sued.

Our utmost concern is the safety and health of our staff and parishioners. To that end, when we decide it is safe to open the church building, our services will look quite different. We will follow the “COVID-19 Responsible Protocols for Getting Ohio Back to Work” developed by the State. The guiding principles include: 1) protect the health of employees, customers and their families (in our case staff and parishioners); 2) support community efforts to control the spread of the virus; and 3) lead in responsibly getting Ohio back to work (in our case in-person worship).

The five basic protocols we will follow:

- 1) **Require face coverings** – masks **MUST** be worn by all participants and will be made available for those without one.
- 2) **Conduct health assessments** – We will be taking temperatures of all people entering the sanctuary; if people are sick, feverish, have a cough or cold, etc. we ask that you stay home. We will also stress that those who have underlying conditions or compromised immunity should stay home.
- 3) **Maintain good hygiene** – frequent hand washing, sanitizing and social distancing
- 4) **Clean and sanitize** – we will focus on deep cleaning of the facility and frequent sanitizing and cleaning, with extra emphasis on the high touch areas
- 5) **Limit Capacity** to Meet Social Distancing Guidelines – the State has established maximum capacity at 50% of the fire code. We have designed a layout for our church in order to meet the social distancing guidelines

Medical Concerns

- Social gatherings in alignment with current Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommendations
- Masks **MUST** be worn by all participants and will be made available for those without one.
- Once taken, the mask is owned by the person. They should take full responsibility for the mask (laundering, using at all church events).
- Hand Sanitizer at all doors
- No socialization
- If you feel ill, you’ve come in contact with someone ill, or you’ve knowingly been exposed, refrain from coming to church events.
- Baker Street door is “in” for entry and then “out” for exit
- Temperatures - temperature should not be above 100.3
- Gloves not required

Property Concerns

- Sanctuary has been mapped out with detailed drawing of appropriate social distancing protocol options.
- ALL pencils, envelopes, hymnals, and Bibles will be removed from the pews to minimize as many potential touch points as possible.
- Pew cushions will be removed from pews that **WILL BE UTILIZED** by congregants. Removed cushions will be stored (and stacked) in the unused pews and will help prevent people from sitting in those areas to promote social distancing.

- We recommend that consideration be given to ONLY STARTING WITH ONE (1) service per weekend once we do decide to go back to services in the sanctuary. Once we can do this safely and successfully, we can re-evaluate.
- One service per weekend will also (reasonably) allow for proper cleaning and disinfection between services.
- The CDC has recommended that any building which is closed for 7 days (our sanctuary), does not need a massive cleaning as the disease cannot survive. In the event we need deep cleaning, we have met with Erie Environmental (<https://erie-environmental.com/>). They are a certified/professional environmental company specializing in a number of remediation specialties (radon, asbestos, lead, mold, water and fire damage and commercial/ industrial disinfection). While not cheap, we both highly recommend at least starting with their services and gauging results.
- Bathroom off the sanctuary will be the only one in use. Cleaning supplies will be available for members to use if they choose to do so.
- All other doorways into other parts of the church will be closed.
- Six Hand Sanitation stations will be set up throughout the sanctuary.
- The Baker Street entrance will be the single point of entry and exit. The State Street doors cannot be locked and must remain at least accessible in case of a fire; however, everyone will be directed to enter and exit Baker Street.
- As people enter the sanctuary, they will be directed to a designated seating area supported by reservation arrangements made with the church office in advance.
- Exiting after the service will also be done with a strategy to maximize social distancing, minimize mingling and allow for a controlled and systematic exit of congregants (similar to wedding dismissal).

Caring Concerns

Meals:

- All volunteers will need to be trained on how to properly wear masks and gloves as well as social distancing requirements.
- When we return, all meals will be a simple sandwich, chips, salad, dessert, and drink. The meals will be served by the kitchen volunteers on Styrofoam plates along with plastic utensils. This way everyone will throw away their own plates and utensils.
- A weekly menu for Spirit will not be provided, as in the past, due to certain food shortages. Staff will buy what is most cost effective each week.
- Parents will be asked to pick up meals for their children and that no children come into the kitchen. Children are not always good at keeping their hands off the counter or social distancing.
- Food safety – According to experts, raw foods are not an area of concern. All produce will be washed before eating to alleviate any concern. Cooked foods are not a concern as viruses are killed in the cooking process.
- The dining room tables will be set up at least 6 feet apart. The number of people per table must be kept to a minimum.

Small Groups: When we resume meeting in small groups, we recommend that they remain 10 or fewer people in a group. Meeting at the church is probably the best choice rather than at homes for the safety of our families. The dining room, or possibly the lounge, are the best choices within the church due to their size and ability to social distance.

- Small groups for adults should stay online for the foreseeable future, except for moving outside where possible.
- This group is not in favor of children meeting in groups at all. Once school begins again, they will be exposed enough just going to school; the group doesn't feel it is worth increasing the risk to children by having them attend small groups.
- Overall, the Caring Team feels we should not rush gathering in any way. Worship is going well online and with the ability of gathering online for small groups it is not worth the risk to come together physically any time soon.

Youth and Family Concerns

- VBS- This will be a virtual family experience.
- Sunday School- Children will not meet in Sunday School. Upon entering the church each child will be given a bag with an activity and a pencil. We will request them to bring their own crayons or colored pencils to use along with it. All items from the bag will go home with the children. All children will stay in their pews with their parents the entire time.
- Children's Message- This will be delivered from the front while the children remain in the pews with their parents.

Worship and Music Concerns

- All online services will continue as an option for people to worship
- Currently, Drive-In Church for all LIFT congregations, is held at the St. John's parking lot at 9 am on Sundays.
- When we open we will offer services on Sunday at 9 am. Reservations with the church office will be needed to attend this service to ensure we can accommodate the number of attendees.
- All doors will be propped open so no one needs to touch a door handle
- Ushers will be needed to direct people to assigned seating.
- Greeters will invite those attending to take a bulletin, a Communion kit and a mask. Remind them that we are following social distancing guidelines. They may only sit in the marked pews.
- Touchless Hand sanitizer will be available at six locations.
- There will be no singing during the service (choir or congregation) due to research on the spread of COVID 19. Our organist will play the organ and/or the piano. String instruments will be allowed, as well as the bell choir, for those willing to play (social distancing will be required).
- Other music will be added (i.e. videos).
- Passing of peace will be included using waves or crossing arm over hearts
- No baptisms at this time in the sanctuary.
- No close fellowship will be allowed before or after services. If people do not follow the guidelines, services will be stopped for the immediate future.
- Offering plates will not be passed, including the noisy offering. Offering plates will be at each door for people to drop in their offering.

- Readers who want to read will be invited to do so.
- No acolytes will be used at this time.
- Children's Message will be spoken in the front of the church while the children stand on the pews in order to see. (Cushions will already have been removed.)
- Children's Worship Bags will be removed.
- A moment for reflection will be added after the sermon and after Holy Communion
- Holy Communion - we will use a sealed, prepackaged cup (juice) and wafer as pictured below. We will preplan and put one 'fellowship cup' into a small styrofoam cup so no one will need to touch multiple cups. A table will be set up at the entrance with these cups properly spaced. When people enter the sanctuary, they will be handed a bulletin (*if they did not download a copy from our mass email*), and a styrofoam cup. During the service, we will all share the bread together at the appropriate time and then the juice together. After Communion, we will have quiet time for reflection. We will invite everyone at the end of the service to please take their Styrofoam cups (*which will hold the empty communion container pictured below*) and put them into the trash cans at the doors.

