

Stewart Avenue Lutheran Church

Plans for Returning to In Person Worship in Time of COVID-19



Peace and Greetings to you!

We hope that you are doing well in these tough times. We want you to know that we, the church council are currently working on plans so that we can return to in-person worship as soon as possible, but most importantly, as safely as possible. Unfortunately, designing out a well-laid plan takes some time as there are many circumstances that we need to consider. Every possible circumstance requires thoughtful preparation, and most include volunteers and/or materials necessary to address the circumstance and all possible outcomes.

Please read through our plan. It is our hope that this is a plan that we can all subscribe to. Should you have any questions, jot them down. We are going to give everyone an opportunity to ask those questions with a congregational zoom meeting. Tentatively, we have this scheduled for July 16 at 7pm. We will send you information on how to join. If you are unable to join, you can send us your questions prior and we will address them.

We are committed to returning to in-person worship so long as all of the following guidelines are met...

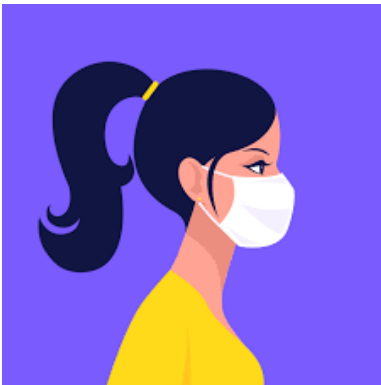
- 1.) Church council has unanimously voted in favor to return
- 2.) There is a general consensus among the members to return based on the results of the survey
- 3.) Federal, state, local and synod guidelines allow us to do so
- 4.) No one who has contracted the virus has been in the church property within a month.
- 5.) There is a clear, well detailed, written plan that encompasses all possible scenarios has been distributed physically and electronically to all members and employees.
- 6.) We have all the necessary items to implement that plan. Items such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant, masks, supplies required for safe communion, etc.
- 7.) We have approval from our insurance company, Church Mutual, as well as the Bishop's office.
- 8.) We are able to enlist the services of worship assistants at every service. The roles of ushers, worship assistants, readers, and sound people will be vital.

Here are some of the major changes that will take place in order to mitigate exposure, follow social distancing guidelines, and

- Singing and corporate prayer will not be a part of service until some of the restrictions are lifted. Singing and corporate prayer has been proven to increase the amount of droplets in the air. Praying will still very much be a part of the worship service, but we are asking that everyone recite the prayers silently in your head and heart. God can certainly hear our prayers whether spoken aloud or inside just the same. Music will still be a part of worship through instrumental music.

- The pews will be completely emptied out of all materials. There will be no hymnals, offering envelopes, praise booklets, pencils, etc. Bulletins will be available via email for people to print out at home if they wish, or to view on their phones during worship. However, the services will be easy to follow without a bulletin, so having one is not required.
- There will be a clearly defined in/out path that we all must stick to. And that path is determined by which area of the church you are seated.
- The exit paths will be identified with green arrows.
- If you are showing any signs of illness, including but not limited to coughing, sneezing, fever, sore throat, difficulty breathing, headaches, nausea, etc, we ask that you stay home. Please let us know so we can pray for you as well. Consult your doctor if you feel necessary. Stay safe and healthy!
- No passing of the peace and no receiving line at the end of the service. We ask that everyone leave the building immediately following worship service.
- There will be floor arrows clearly marking the proper exits that we are to follow, as well as designated areas for consumption of communion.

When we return to church for worship, there will be requirements expected for all to follow.



Masks:

- Masks are an absolute requirement and there are no exceptions to this rule, other than children 2 and under. We ask that people bring and wear their own masks, but we will have some masks on hand should anyone not have one or forget. If you take a mask, please take it home with you. Do not dispose of it in any of the church waste baskets.
- Should anyone absolutely refuse to wear a mask, or refuse to wear their mask properly (pull it down away from their nose and mouth), they will calmly be asked to wear it and wear it properly. If the person is in absolute refusal, the service will end at that time and everyone will be asked to depart the building.

This of course is not something to be desired, so we ask that if you do not want to wear a mask, you return when the guidelines change.

- Masks will be worn by Pastor Beth, all worship assistants, altar guild crew, and all congregants.



Hand Sanitizer:

- There will be multiple hand sanitizing stations located in various areas of the church, and especially nearby all doors that we will be using. Please use the hand sanitizer properly after touching any surface. And while it is not a requirement, we strongly encourage members to carry their own hand sanitizer to use, for example, after you take your seat in your pew.
- Pastor Beth and the altar guild team will properly sanitize their hands before and after handling communion items, as well as any worship paraments.



Ensuring surfaces are sanitized:

- Our custodian, Sharon, has offered her services to work extra to clean the sanctuary, narthex, altar area, altar guild area, balcony, restrooms, and touchable surfaces after each service.
- We also will be calling on volunteers to help with this task. Our goal is to have an additional 4 volunteers each Sunday.



Physical Distancing:

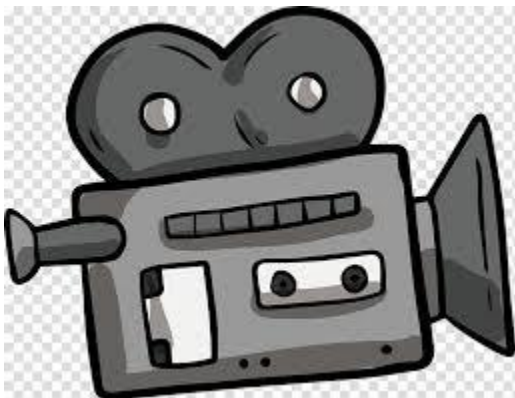
- At the time of this write-up, it is recommended to have no more than 250 people gathering in one space.
- We will ensure no one outside of family or friend units are seated within 6 feet of one another. A friend unit is defined as two or more people who do not live in the same house but feel comfortable sitting next to one another at worship.
- Entry doors will be separate from exit doors. Each side of the sanctuary will have their own exit. The lectern side will share the same exit door as the balcony, however, they will be dismissed at slightly different times.

- There will be no social gathering before or after church, or passing of the peace.
- Should social distancing guidelines change, we will update ours to follow suit.



Attendance and Sign-up:

- In order to maintain proper social distancing, we ask that you sign up for church services. For most of us, email works great. Each Monday, we will send out a sign-up sheet to which you can easily respond to. You can respond that you will either be present, or not be present, and if so, how many will be in your group/family. If you do not respond by the Thursday prior to worship, we will assume you will not be present.
- If you don't have email, or prefer not to use email, fear not. We will reach out to you prior to emailing the weekly list and personally ask you.
- Based on family size, we should be able to allow between 33 and 105 people in the sanctuary during worship (includes narthex, sanctuary, balcony and altar area). We can go slightly over these amounts only if we can maintain proper social distancing.
- Upon entering the church, an usher will check off your name from the list of all the people who signed up to worship that Sunday. These lists will also be a benefit to us should we need to do contact tracing.



Recording and Streaming Live Worship:

- We are going to utilize a device called “Mevo” to record and stream the worship service live so people at home can watch.
- In order to do this, we are increasing our internet speed (no additional cost for this), and getting a stronger router (an extra \$10 per month)

Restroom Use:

- Proper handwashing is critical as we will not have the luxury of sanitizing the restrooms between each use.
- Use a paper towel to turn off faucets and open doors
- The upstairs unisex restroom in the McInerney room will be the only restroom allowed in use. All other restrooms will be out-of-use.
- The water fountains will also be out of use.

Balcony:

- We will utilize the balcony as a way to allow more people into the building.
- A safety railing will be installed as the current rail is too low and does not meet guidelines
- Those seated in the balcony will be directed to exit via the red door by the mailbox, which is the same exit door as those seated on the lectern side. As a result, the balcony will be dismissed a few minutes after the lectern side.
- We ask only those who are physically able to sit in the balcony
- We ask that young children do not sit in the balcony.



Hot Humid Days:

~~Because we cannot run the fans during in-person worship service, council will make decisions each Thursday whether or not to cancel Sunday morning worship.~~

- We recognize the inherent danger of overheating and cannot hold services on particularly hot/humid days where masks are required and fans are prohibited.
- Should worship be cancelled, Pastor Beth will live stream worship from the church with only herself and a small crew (sound, video, reader, etc). In this instance, masks will not be required due to the large distance

between the small amount of people present.

- **7-19-20 amendment to COVID plan: we have decided to allow the use of fans during hot/humid days.**

Offering:

- Offering will be done via 2 ushers with handled baskets. Immediately after collection, they will take the baskets up to the altar. The baskets will not be handed off to assistants.



Communion:

- All those handling the host (cracker) must use gloves, as well as to sanitize their hands before and after handling the communion elements.
- There will be a hand sanitizer bottle on the altar table.
- Worship leaders must be wearing masks within a 6ft. Radius of the altar table
- Pastor will conduct communion each week solely, however, as it is experimental, she along with the Worship and Music Committee may want to revisit the procedures as we go along.
- In order to be good stewards of the earth and to provide communion in the safest way possible, Pastor recommends that we celebrate communion with one element (host - cracker) for a time.
 - We believe that Christ is fully present in both the bread and wine, so our theology supports communing in one kind.
- No Touch Distribution
 - Prior to Service
 - Pastor will set up communion for congregation.
 - Altar Guilds can still set up the main altar table.
 - Will be altered a bit from what they are currently used to
 - On the old altar table, currently placed in the choir loft, we will set up trays where pre-prepared plates can be placed.
 - Use forceps or tongs to handle the consecrated host (cracker)
 - Drop the host into small paper cup
 - Cover cups with fair linen
 - Set up small table on main sanctuary floor, which will be used during distribution
 - Provide small open bins (preferably baskets of some kind) for people to drop cups into on their way back to their seats
- Distribution to Worship Leadership During Worship
 - We will use one cracker for the Eucharistic Prayer/Words of Institution - We will NOT use this cracker to commune the worship leaders.
 - We will keep pre-broken cracker pieces in the covered ciborium (the small silver container that has a lid - Pastor usually holds this and distributes the host from it when she communes the congregation), and the cover will remain on until it is time to commune worship leaders.
 - Pastor will sanitize hands after doing the Words of Institution.

- Pastor will use small tongs to remove the host from the ciborium and place the pieces onto cups on the altar table (including onto a plate for herself)
- Once the crackers have been placed into the cups, Pastor will move away from the table, give the invitation (“the body of Christ given for you”), then will move forward, take the cracker out of a cup, move away from the table to consume it.
 - Pastor will repeat this process with each leader that is on the altar.
- Once the other leaders have been communed, Pastor will sanitize her hands again.
- Distribution to Congregation During Worship
 - At the instruction of the usher, the communicant will move to a designated spot, which will be marked, near the front of the center aisle.
 - The communicant will take the cup with the host and move to a designated consumption area, which will be marked on the floor
 - We will repeat this process for every person that comes forward.
 - For children or adults who would like to receive a blessing, Pastor will make a sign of the cross in the air and say a blessing to them.
- For Ushers
 - When dismissing people from their aisle, this needs to be done much slower than usual.
 - We do not want a long line of people waiting.
 - We will tape off line markers on the floor to help people maintain safe physical distancing.

What if one of our members or employees contracts the virus?

- If it is determined that any of our members or employees contracted the virus and has been in the building or close contact with someone who has been in the building, we will postpone services for two weeks to decrease the risk of infection.
- Members will be updated during the two week period.

Gradual August Return utilizing our Live Stream capabilities 7-29-20 amendment to COVID plan

- This will be an intentional time to learn/practice/fine tune our “Return to In-Person Worship” Plan
 - o Leadership will have the opportunity to learn/practice the new process and how to operate under the new guidelines.
 - o Congregation Members will have the chance to see what to expect and have some time to get used to the new flow of worship before they return, so it doesn’t feel quite as jarring their first Sunday back in the sanctuary.
 - o Communion will be added to worship
 - Pastor Beth can provide a short instructional video prior to August 9th to help people learn what they need and how to set up at home.
 - If people are unable to afford elements (bread/crackers/etc or wine/juice), then we can provide them with wafers and wine/juice.
 - The presence of communion at in-person worship service will be evaluated on a week-by-week basis.
- Each week, we will focus on a different part (or parts) of the plan.
 - Week 1 (target date August 9th)
 - Who will be there?

- A small crew consisting of Pastor Beth, a sound person, a reader, Brian & Vince, a worship assistant, a live streaming operator, and an usher.
 - This service will be a basic, 'let's get the basic mechanics of the livestream figured out, let's get leadership used to being in the space in this new way.'
 - While all aspects of church will be practiced regarding our new (temporary) way of doing things, the main focus of this Sunday will be the live streaming.
 - Everyone must properly wear their masks as they enter and leave the building. But are not required during the service.
 - Communion will be practiced as a table blessing for all congregants and will be evaluated on a week by week basis.
- Week 2 (target date August 16th)
 - Who will be there?
 - Small crew (listed in wk 1), and members of their immediate family.
 - From here on out, masks are to be properly worn during the entire service.
 - Focus: Communion
 - How will individuals come forward.
 - Is there enough space set up in the front for the person receiving communion and Pastor, or do we need to rethink the distribution spacing?
 - Week 3 (target date August 23rd)
 - Who will be there?
 - Small crew, immediate family, an additional few people limited to no more than 20 people in the sanctuary and 1 usher.
 - Focus: Sign-in process, seating
 - How will people be checked in?
 - Is it efficient?
 - How will ushers seat folks?
 - Do folks feel separated enough?
 - Week 4 (target date August 30th)
 - Who will be there?
 - Small crew, immediate family, an additional group of people limited to no more than 25 people in the sanctuary and 1 usher.
 - Focus: "traffic" flow and seating
 - Have some people sit in the balcony and each side of the sanctuary.
 - How does the flow of traffic feel/work for entering and exiting?
 - Does the delayed exit of the balcony work like we think it will?

We are especially asking members from the congregation to volunteer during this four week process either as readers, worship assistants, ushers, sound operators, live stream operators, as well as congregants themselves. If volunteering as a congregant, we ask for your help in reviewing our focus of the Sunday. For week 3, we will ask you to pay special attention to the sign in process, and after the service, we will ask for your input. For week 4, we will ask you to pay special attention to the traffic flow and seating aspect of worship, and again, we will ask for your input afterwards.



It is critical to understand that this plan is fluid. As the weeks pass, guidelines will change. They may become less restrictive, or they may become more restrictive. We also as a church, may find better ways to do things, and could change accordingly.

This virus means different things to different people. We ask that everyone respect everyone else's differing opinions on dealing with the threat of COVID-19. Let us

not forget that we are always a church, whether in the building or not, that God is always worshipable, that prayers are heard regardless of location, volume or circumstance, and most importantly....**GOD IS WITH US...ALL THE TIME!**