

Good Shepherd COVID-19 Phased Reopening Plan

Prepared by the COVID-19 Task Force

In all situations, we want to err on the side of love for our neighbor and know that change will be inevitable. Patience, grace, and flexibility will be necessary as we strive to make the most appropriate decisions for the people of God in our place at this time. This plan is subject to change as we learn more about the virus and how it is impacting communities.

As we reopen, we will carefully consider:

- Legally binding orders
- The safety of the community and congregation
- Recommendations from health officials¹
- Recommendations from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America²
- Insurer loss-control recommendations and our insurance policy
- Following state guidelines and federal guidelines for a four-phased approach to opening³
- Of particular note are the criteria for moving from strict physical distancing (**Phase I**) to a staged reopening (**Phase II**). These four **gating criteria** need to be met:
 1. The number of new cases has declined in the state for at least 14 days (we will also pay attention to Winneshiek County numbers and to trends in Wisconsin and Minnesota).
 2. Rapid diagnostic testing capacity is sufficient to test, at minimum, all people with COVID-19 symptoms, including mild cases, as well as their close contacts and those in essential roles.
 3. The health care system is able to safely care for all patients, including providing appropriate personal protective equipment for health care workers.
 4. There is sufficient public health capacity to conduct contact tracing for all new cases and their close contacts.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

² https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Returning_to_In-person_Worship.pdf?_ga=2.260797133.1551487626.1590864742-671246993.1587572363

³ National Coronavirus Response: A Road Map to Reopening," American Enterprise Institute, [National coronavirus response: A road map to reopening](#); "Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors," Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Health Security, https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf; and "Guidelines: Opening Up America Again," <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>.

Our “phased” approach will likely not be a linear one; there may be times of gradual reopening as infections decrease, followed by restrictions if new waves of infections emerge.

Phase I

- Online worship services, no in person services in the building
- We will consider the option of offering outdoor worship services, including funerals and weddings, with 50 or fewer people. Masks and physical distancing measures are required. Size exceptions may be considered for family only funerals. No rain location will be provided. Restrooms will be available on a limited basis. All requests need to be approved by the Congregation Council.
- Online education activities, small groups, and meetings
- Most ministry staff will work from home
- Office will be staffed by the Administrative Assistant with diligent cleaning and sanitizing of utilized spaces
- Funerals and memorials will be held at gravesides with ten or fewer people present
- Weddings will be held outdoors with ten or fewer people present
- Building closed except for essential staff - not used for Kinderhaus or meetings of outside groups
- Pastors will provide pastoral care via phone, Zoom, email and cards

In Phases II-IV

- GSLC Basic Safety Protocol must be followed by all participants in worship and all who enter the building:
 - use hand sanitizer/wash hands thoroughly
 - wear a mask/face covering
 - practice physical distancing (remain at least 6 feet apart)
- Cleaning Protocol must be followed: All spaces used will be cleaned thoroughly following each use following CDC guidelines.
- Masks will be provided to those who do not bring them. (Congregation members are asked to contribute masks for this.)
- No food or beverages will be served in the building.
- The nursery will remain closed and children’s activity bags will not be provided.
- Anyone who is high risk for a more severe COVID-19 illness (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions) is encouraged to stay home.
- Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms needs to stay home.

- The office will be staffed by the Administrative Assistant with diligent cleaning and sanitizing of utilized spaces. The office will be available only to staff and Congregation Treasurer.
- No group singing and no wind instruments will be used in worship or gatherings unless studies indicate these are safe.
- Records of who attends worship will be kept to aid in contact tracing.

Phase II

If all four gating criteria required to move to Phase II have been met, Good Shepherd will consider the following practices:

- Short outdoor worship opportunities:
 - GSLC Basic Safety Protocol must be followed
 - Restrooms will be open with strict physical distancing measures in place
- Online worship services will continue to be offered
- Most of the resources for worship will be focused on online worship in order to be an inclusive community
- Online education activities, small groups, and meetings are recommended and encouraged
- Ministry staff will be encouraged to work from home
- Limited building access by appointment only following GSLC Basic Safety Protocol
- Pastors will provide pastoral care via phone, Zoom, email, cards and in person following outdoor worship services
- Small group gatherings (committees, circles, groups) that are part of Good Shepherd's ministry may meet outside, restrooms available but not encouraged
- AI Anon and Friends of Recovery may meet outdoors, restrooms available but not encouraged
- Funerals and weddings will be safest outdoors but under some circumstances, may be held in the sanctuary provided that:
 - The gathering is limited to a predetermined number of people, including pastors, in the entire facility based on current regulations (limited either by recommendations for size of social gathering or by recommendations for percentage of capacity)
 - GSLC Basic Safety Protocol is followed
 - All requests must be approved by the congregation council.

Phase III

If after the implementation of Phase II, there are another two full weeks in which the gating criteria are met again, then Good Shepherd will consider the following practices:

- Continue to hold online worship services
- May determine to continue outdoor worship rather than move into the sanctuary
- May begin offering limited indoor, in-person worship opportunities, subject to social gathering and capacity limitations, and to specific guidelines determined by GSLC for Phase III in-person worship, provided that GSLC Basic Safety Protocol is followed
- Funerals and weddings may be allowed in the sanctuary, following the size limits and guidelines for in-person worship
- Online education activities, small groups, and meetings are recommended and encouraged
- Some small group gatherings may take place in the church building provided GSLC Basic Safety Protocol is followed- groups determined by the congregation council subject to social gathering and capacity limitations provided that GSLC Basic Safety Protocol is followed
- Ministry staff may work in the building or off-site
- Limited building access following GSLC Basic Safety Protocol

Phase IV

If after the implementation of Phase III, there are another two full weeks in which the gating criteria are met again then Good Shepherd will consider the following practices:

- Continue to hold online worship services
- Expand in-person worship opportunities subject to specific guidelines determined by GS for Phase III in-person worship, provided GSLC Basic Safety Protocol
- Funerals and weddings will be allowed in the sanctuary, following the size limits and guidelines for in-person worship
- Online education activities, small groups, and meetings are encouraged
- Small group gatherings may take place in the church building provided GSLC Basic Safety Protocol are followed
- Pastors may return to some in-person visits but will not visit those over 60 in their homes until nursing homes in the area are reopened for visitors

Phase V

When considering a full reopening of the church facility for worship, fellowship, and education, Good Shepherd will take into account the following factors:

- Local, national, and global numbers of infected persons
- Evidence of significant slowing or eradication of the virus
- Accessibility and effectiveness of vaccines and treatments
- Outside guidance related to group speaking, group singing, and use of wind instruments

- Please note that research data are not fully available about the risk related to these activities and we will need to be patient, pragmatic and plan to continue risk mitigation

Specific guidance for Phase III and IV for worship is still in process and will be considered more fully by the Worship and Music Committee, we won't share this with the congregation yet. Council does not need to review this

PHASE III - Indoor Worship - restricted to 50 people or fewer

- People will be required to sign up for worship services in advance, up to a set number. This will be helpful in maintaining a record of who was physically present in the event a case is identified and assistance is needed with contact tracing.
- Maintain physical distancing in worship (at least six feet, excluding households). Limit one household unit per pew; keep empty pews between families.
- Close common areas (fellowship halls, church offices, coffee spaces).
- Refrain from communion, handshakes, passing offering plates, and handing out printed bulletins.
- Worshipers wear masks at all times.
- People should not attend worship if they are feeling ill, have been exposed to COVID-19, have compromised immune systems, or are at high risk of exposing others. They are welcome to continue to participate in online worship and protect those at high risk from any social stigma associated with their decision not to attend.
- Provide hand sanitizer at all entrances and in the pews/seating area.
- Map clear routes of movement from the entryway into the worship space, and plan ways to maintain physical distancing while people move along those routes.
- Consider dismissing in an orderly way to maximize social distancing
- As applicable, set HVAC systems to introduce fresh air into the worship space and/or open windows and doors to encourage fresh air over recycled air.
- Make preparations for restroom distancing. Limit the number who may enter at the same time, using tape on the floor for those waiting in order to maintain proper physical distancing.
- Nursery care not available at this time.
- Remove materials from the worship and gathering spaces such as bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, welcome pads, children's bags, etc.
- Remove any items made with soft/porous materials (rugs/chairs/cushions), if possible, to reduce challenges for cleaning and disinfecting them.

- Bulletins will not be handed out by ushers or greeters. Pre-place bulletins in the sections where seating is allowed. This will provide another visual cue for physical distancing.
- Follow guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting all spaces prior to people returning.⁴
- Singing -
- Music - keyboard and rhythm OK - no wind instruments?

PHASE IV - Indoor Worship for more than 50 people

- Maintain increased sanitation/cleaning and hygiene measures at church.
- Resume in-person worship with other members (insofar as they feel comfortable doing so).
- Continue online worship for those who still cannot gather.
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- Instead of stating a # of people (< 50 or > 50) - perhaps we should be talking about capacity of the worship space, as in 25% capacity, 50% capacity, etc.
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