



# **COVID-19 Preparedness Plan**

## **First Lutheran Church, Battle Lake, MN**

Background: The COVID-19 Pandemic began in Minnesota in March of 2020. COVID-19 virus is a highly contagious virus. To protect the public, measures are put in place following guidelines provided from the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the Governor, and the NW MN Synod/ELCA. The requirements consider space size, flow of movement, duration of time in designated shared space, and how the nature of the COVID-19 virus to easily spread in large group gatherings no matter how much planned physical distancing is implemented.

On May 22, 2020 an Executive Order was issued by the Governor requiring places of Worship to develop and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan prior to returning to inside the building activity. Worship practices are subject to change as conditions and Executive Orders change throughout the pandemic.

First Lutheran Church is committed to providing a safe and healthy facility for our staff, members, and visitors. This plan was developed to ensure that strategies and procedures are in place to preserve public health. The entire church will have a role in implementing this plan to mitigate transmission of this virus. Therefore, all persons in our facility will be expected to comply with all aspects of this plan. The church leadership and council will have full support in enforcing the provisions of this plan. The plan to resume indoor services and activities will be based on a phased plan as determined by church leadership based on appropriate guidance measures from the CDC, MDH and the Synod/ELCA as well as determined benchmarks. See Appendix A.

This preparedness and response plan assume the following:

1. First Lutheran Church will follow guidance from the CDC, Minnesota Governor, the Minnesota Department of Health, and from Synod/ELCA.
2. First Lutheran Church personnel will fall into different disease risk categories and decisions for return to the facility will be made in accordance with medical and public health guidance for risk stratification (e.g. age, health status). First Lutheran Church's role is not to determine the risk level of individuals; rather the church leadership should ensure that individuals can make their own informed choices and be supported.
3. The COVID-19 situation will evolve and First Lutheran Church will remain adaptable and flexible to the dynamic environment. The baseline level of risk for those working and using our facility will change as restaurants and retail businesses reopen, schools reopen, etc., requiring a reassessment of what level of resumption and precautions are appropriate.
4. Those functions that can practically stay at home to complete work will do so until First Lutheran Church is fully opened to minimize large gatherings.
5. Physical distancing, wearing of masks or other appropriate PPE, hand-washing, and disinfection of surfaces are key factors to reducing the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

6. Personal responsibility is key to safe operations and the avoidance of disease transmission. Educational materials will be developed for staff, members, and visitors to the First Lutheran Church facility.

This plan has been developed by the First Lutheran SMART Team, Church Council and Staff

Designated Plan Administrator: Bill Taylor

**I. Occupancy Restriction for Worship:**

1. First Lutheran Occupancy Limit will allow 25% of our seating capacity inside of the sanctuary which is 75 people.
2. We require that all people practice physical distancing of 6 feet between households and wear face masks.
3. Large group indoor activity (greater than 75 people) will not be considered at this time without further guidance from the CDC, MDH, and the Synod/ELCA. Those guidelines will be reviewed and adapted based on the need and ability to provide safety measures for the protection of the staff, congregation and visitors.
4. The church will not be available for outside organizations at this time. Families hosting weddings or funerals will be notified of the protocols in place to be used during the event.

**II. Alternative Service Options:**

1. Virtual services, phone contact and outreach to vulnerable persons will continue to be provided. These persons may be considered higher risk for COVID-19. People who consider themselves to be in a high risk category are encouraged to stay at home and not attend group gatherings involving people outside of their immediate household. (further information can be found at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
2. Parking Lot services began June 28, 2020. Guidance for attendance of these services was provided to all congregation members and is available on the First Lutheran Church website. (See Appendix B)

**III. Faith Practices:**

1. Singing is considered a higher-risk activity as it more forcefully expels respiratory droplets than speaking. The congregation shall refrain from singing in group settings. Musicians that will be singing must maintain a distance of 18 feet from individuals. Prerecorded music or instrumental music are allowed. Musicians are encouraged to practice physical distancing guidelines and wear masks.
2. No food consumption in group settings will be allowed at this time.
3. Bulletins will be available via email or on the First Lutheran website. One time use bulletins will be provided for outdoor / parking lot services.
4. Offering plates will not be passed. Drop off locations will be provided. Members may also mail their contribution or utilize the online giving feature on the First Lutheran Church website.
5. Communion will be adapted to comply with physical distancing practices. No common cup will be used. Instruction has been provided for the ability to participate in communion during the virtual / online service and the outdoor / parking lot service. Members requesting physically distant in-person communion are encouraged to contact the church office.

6. Entering and exiting the worship service will follow appropriate physical distancing guidelines. Congregation members are encouraged not to gather in small groups and to avoid close personal contact with members outside of their household.

#### **IV. Minimizing Possible Transmission of the Virus:**

1. Information will be provided and signage will be posted at entrances informing participants that if staff, members or visitors do not feel well or may have any symptoms of COVID-19 they should not enter the building.
2. Non-contact thermometers will be used to conduct temperature checks for participants entering the building.
3. Participants are encouraged to stay at home if they have any symptoms of COVID-19. Information has been provided via a congregational letter and the First Lutheran Church website. Additional information regarding symptoms may be found at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).
4. Persons should stay at home if they have a family member that is experiencing symptoms compatible with COVID-19 or pending COVID-19 test results.
5. Persons who have had close contact with confirmed and quarantined cases should stay at home. Persons who have had a recent COVID-19 test should not attend until results and appropriate quarantine period is completed.
6. Participants are encouraged to wash or sanitize hands frequently, cover cough by coughing into their elbow or a tissue that is disposed of immediately.
7. Staff, members, and visitors will avoid gathering in groups and in confined areas where six feet separation cannot be maintained. Staff, members, and visitors are required to wear masks at all times. Masks may be removed when staff are in their personal offices with the doors shut or when they are the only person in the building.
8. If a participant begins to feel unwell while at the facility they should leave immediately and isolate at home. They are encouraged to contact their medical provider for further guidance.
9. If a participant develops symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19 after attending a worship service they should immediately contact the local public health office to let them know they were at a recent worship service at First Lutheran. We will work in conjunction with local public health officials to determine any potential exposure and follow all recommended guidelines at that time. All appropriate HIPPA considerations will be taken to protect the confidentiality of any individuals involved.

#### **V. Staff Protections and Protocols**

1. Staff are encouraged to work from home when practical until it is determined that First Lutheran church is able to safely fully reopen to staff. Determination to reopen to staff will be based on guidance of the CDC, MDH and the Synod/ELCA and approved by the Church Council.
2. Equipment is available for staff members to complete their assigned duties at home.
3. If onsite work is required, staff are encouraged to use flexible work scheduling to limit the number of staff in the same place at the same time. Staff will adhere to physical distancing practices, wear a mask if there is interaction with other individuals, and practice frequent hand washing or sanitizing procedures. Staff will avoid using anyone else's personal

protective equipment, phones or electronic devices. Work surfaces should be sanitized using approved procedures. (see Appendix C)

4. Persons interacting with staff will adhere to physical distancing practices and wear a mask.
5. All staff will be provided a copy of the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, and instruction to contact the Plan Administrator with questions or concerns.
6. Staff members should conduct self-monitoring using self-assessment checklist (see Appendix C) for signs and symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms of the virus often include but are not limited to fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Information on COVID-19 signs and symptoms are available at the CDC website.
7. Staff should not report to work if they are ill and should leave work immediately if they begin to feel ill with symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
8. Staff who have been in close contact with a household member with COVID-19 should not work until their quarantine period is finished.
9. If a staff member becomes ill they should immediately contact the pastor. The employee should contact their medical provider and Ottertail County Public Health as appropriate.
10. If the Pastor becomes ill the Church Council President should be notified. The Pastor should contact their medical provider and Ottertail County Public Health if appropriate.
11. Return to work guidelines from MDH will be followed before individuals who have been ill, potentially exposed or have tested positive will be all allowed to re-enter the building. <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/returntowork.pdf>
12. Salaried staff will continue to be paid during time of illness, quarantine, or isolation per Letter of Call and Short-Term Disability provisions. When possible, staff will be encouraged to work from home. Hourly/Part-time staff may be allowed to “make up” hours needed to complete job tasks as needed.

## **VI. Source Control and Hygiene**

1. Water fountains will not be available for use.
2. Tissues and waste receptacles will be provided in various locations of the building.
3. Waste receptacles will be available in bathrooms to ensure a paper towels/tissues can be readily disposed of when operating the door.
4. Handwashing and stop the spread posters will be placed in all restrooms.
5. Hand sanitizer will be readily available throughout the building. Staff will routinely monitor that hand soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer is in adequate supply.

## **VII. Building and Ventilation Protocols**

1. Property and Structures Committee may consult an HVAC professional to ensure proper ventilation is provided and ventilation systems are properly maintained.
2. Attempt to maintain relative humidity levels of RH 40-60%.
3. Run the HVAC system (24/7 if possible) to enhance the ability filter contaminants out of the air. Run HVAC system for 2 hours before and after occupancy if the system allows for this.

## **VIII. Drop-Off, Pick Up and Delivery Practices**

Deliveries and pickups will be received via a contactless method whenever possible. Maintain physical distances practices for any in person encounters while receiving or exchanging deliveries.

**IX. Work and Gathering Space Cleaning and Disinfection Protocols**

1. Maintenance staff will be provided with education and resources required to accomplish safe cleaning and disinfection procedures.
2. An appropriate supply of disinfectants listed on the Environmental Protection Agency List N products that meet guidelines for use against SARS-COV-2 will be available.  
<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>
3. Routinely clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, restrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment, instruments, tools controls, etc. and high touch areas (door handles, light switches, banisters, etc.)
4. Liquid agents should not be used on electronic devices. Sanitize in accordance with listing / labeling requirements.
5. Personal items used in services including microphones should not be shared and will be sanitized after use.
6. Hymnals, Bibles and Quiet Bags will be removed from pews due to their inability to be effectively cleaned or sanitized.
7. Church Library items will not be available until the building is fully open for use.

**X. Communication and Training Practices and Protocols**

1. All leadership and staff will be trained regarding procedures, practices and protocols.
2. This Preparedness Plan will be posted on the main bulletin board in the narthex and available on the First Lutheran website.
3. Communication to educate members and participants about steps being taken for their protection will be available through the church newsletter, website or Facebook page. Protection measures should be communicated to members prior to, and at the start of the event or gathering to educate and inform them of their role in protecting themselves and others.

**XI. Appendices:**

- A. Phases / Benchmarks
- B. Guidance for Outdoor / Parking Lot Services
- C. Self-Assessment Checklist

Approved and Ratified by First Lutheran Church Council on 8/26/2020.