

Three Phase Plan to Return to In-Person Ministry

Recognizing the danger posed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), especially to those who are vulnerable to infection because of age or medical conditions, Immanuel Lutheran Church takes seriously our obligation to demonstrate care and concern for those in our community. Below is a three-phase plan for how to return to in-person ministry safely, based on the recommendations of the Central States Synod, the Centers for Disease Control, and other experts in public health and ecclesiastic leadership.

Phase I

Criteria: 14 day decreasing trend in cases, hospitalizations, deaths, and test positivity rate in Jackson, Johnson, Clay, and Wyandotte counties.

Requirements: Strict Social distancing (10 feet), limited group sizes

Recommendation:

- Continue gathering outdoors for brief spoken services of communion in small groups. Group sizes limited to 10 people total, with pre-registration through reopen.church required.
- Encourage staff members to work from home when possible, and continue to observe strict social distancing while in the workplace. Limit the number of staff in the office at any given time, staggering in-office work days to minimize the time spent together, while allowing as much time as possible to perform necessary tasks, such as communication, correspondence, and administration.
- Sanitize common areas after use.
- Encourage committees to continue to meet through Zoom, or other online mediums.
- Require the use of masks covering the nose and mouth in common areas.
- Develop safe cleaning practices and establish safe traffic patterns for those in attendance.

Phase II

Criteria: 28 days of declining cases, hospitalizations, deaths, and test positivity in the Kansas City Metropolitan area without resurgence

Requirements: moderate social distancing (6 feet), limit gatherings to fewer than 50 people

Recommendation:

- Resume limited, socially distanced worship services. These services will not include: passing the offering plate (an offering will still be collected after the service), sharing of the peace, congregational singing, or any wind instruments.
- Keep windows in the sanctuary open, to facilitate airflow
- Limit services to 50 people (including worship leaders), encouraging them to sign up online for a space using reopen.church.

- Hold sufficient services to accommodate all who wish to worship in person, with enough time between to ensure the worship space is safe.
- Remove from worship spaces any items that cannot be easily sanitized (e.g., pew cushions).
- Place bulletins on seats before each service, six feet apart to encourage social distancing.
- Sanitize the worship space between each service.
- Adapt worship spaces so that services can be live-streamed, and encourage anyone is unable to safely participate in person to attend remotely.
- Prop open all doorways that will be used, and encourage people to avoid touching doorknobs, light switches, and other common points of contact.
- Refrain from shared meals or snacks, including coffee hours and potlucks.
- Ensure that drinking fountains are turned off, to discourage their use.
- Require the use of masks covering the nose and mouth, and provide clean masks for anyone who arrives without one.
- Continue to keep the nursery closed and off-limits, to limit the risk of contamination.

Phase III

Criteria: 42 days of declining cases, hospitalizations, deaths, and test positivity in the Kansas City Metropolitan area without resurgence

Requirements: limited social distancing, caution and care when using common spaces

Recommendation:

- Resume the full liturgy, including passing the offering plate, limited passing of the peace, and the celebration of Holy Communion, with special attention paid to sanitary practices with regards to communion, such as disposable cups and minimal contact between the ministers and the elements.
- Maintain increased sanitation and hygiene practices, and ensure plenty of soap and hand sanitizer is available.
- Continue to require the use masks covering the nose and mouth, until such a time as public health experts no longer recommend their use.
- Recommend that those who wish to share a greeting or a sign of peace with one another refrain from physical contact, replacing handshakes with other signs of greeting, such as a wave or a simple bow.
- Continue to live-stream services, and encourage those who are sick or vulnerable to participate in worship from home.
- Encourage committees to resume their work, meeting in whatever context they choose, either in person or over online video conferences.
- Resume Sunday School, Confirmation, and Adult Forum.
- Evaluate whether to open the nursery to child care again.
- Continue to monitor the situation, with particular attention to the recommendation of local and national public health experts.

In the Case of Exposure at Church Events

When we return to in person ministry, we recognize that there is still risk of potential exposure. We will keep a record of those who attend, along with contact information, so we can communicate clearly in the event of potential exposure. We have an obligation to respect the privacy of our members. We encourage anyone who has attended an event when they were considered to be contagious to tell us as soon as possible, with the assurance their identity will be kept confidential unless they explicitly request otherwise.

Similarly, we have an obligation to notify people of their risk and encourage them to take appropriate measures. Should there be potential exposure, we will notify the congregation, and make specific contact with anyone who might have been exposed.

The Pastor's Advisory Committee will continue to meet, and in the case of potential exposure we will review our next steps on a case by case basis. When any decision is made, we will be clear and consistent, communicating our rationale and pointing to sources that guide our decisions, particularly the advice of local and national health experts.

Vaccinations

As vaccines become available, we expect that community infection levels will drop, and that the sooner people get vaccinated, the sooner we'll be able to return to regular in-person ministry. We strongly encourage everyone to speak with their healthcare provider about getting vaccinated.

As previously mentioned, the Pastor's Advisory Committee will continue to meet until the Congregation Council considers our task complete. We will continue to monitor the four counties in the Kansas City metro area, and in the case of community-wide resurgence after we've moved to another phase or a local outbreak in the community, we will determine the best course of action, including rolling back to prior phases. We will communicate the results of each meeting with an email to the congregation, outlining the topic of our meeting, the decisions we reached, and the rationale of why we reached them. We welcome comments, so please contact us if you have any questions.

The committee consists of:

Pastor Micah Sievenpiper (msievenpiper@gmail.com)

Cece Atherton

Rebecca Blocksome

Beth Callstrom

Randy Callstrom

Linda Fox

B.J. Laven

Sign Ups: Ask folks to sign up by 8 am on Saturday (and give Altar Guild folks the login info to check)

How will the elements be consecrated? (in front or from a distance? Will there be a need for movement of the elements?); leave them in the narthex, but consecrate some elements on the table itself

Include garbage cans outside bell tower and elevator lobby (for communion vessels)

Number of Assistants: one - readings and prayers both; immediately email Karen and Milan; and everyone on altar guild and worship and the arts (and the rest of the congregation)

Flowers on Easter and Pentecost, if we're back in person

Holy Week Worship Services

-Easter Vigil outdoors (could include some limited cantor chanting; could not be streamed)

- encourage flashlights/headlamps

- set up chairs, have a sign up

- hour in length, ish

- communicate weather expectations

- talk to Rick about keeping the fire going

- Start at 7 pm

-Maundy Thursday

- maybe not take *everything* from the chancel (e.g., leave the cushions on the altar rail)

- strip the altar with me and assisting minister (not altar guild)

- music during the stripping of the altar (or Psalm 22 read; not cantor)

- still do communion (consecration > strip altar > send people to receive as they leave)

-Good Friday

- outdoor stations during midday (couldn't be

- indoor service (cross on chancel, not processed)

-Easter

- Bells! (or chimes, maybe)

- Outdoor service, Sanctuary (streamed), and Luther Hall

- Sign ups early; include all services

Outdoor services: Ask John to borrow a portable mic/amp/speaker

- or just buy one

- beware inclement weather

What does weekly worship look like?

- the less movement, the better

Psalm: masked singing, one person, might not be the *worst* thing; masked cantor solos could be a first step, when it comes to that

Will we continue outdoor activities: yes to communion

Music: both live and 'canned'

Could we have a screen, and include the 'best of both worlds' from online and in person?

- if not screen, play audio

- ask John if we have the ability to play recorded audio in the service!

Usher training:

- have masks available

- have them take corrective action if needed

- let them know about the movement of the service; traffic flow, movement of the elements