

I. Overview

The coronavirus pandemic has challenged churches to continue being the Church without gathering in person. Reformation Lutheran Church has met that challenge by providing Digital Daily Devotions and streaming Sunday Worship on FaceBook, and by holding meetings online via Zoom or other tools. The Congregation Council appointed a Transition Team in May 2020 to prepare Reformation to safely resume in person activities with a focus on:

- Protecting our most vulnerable
- Mitigating the risk of COVID-19 resurgence in our community
- Meeting the congregation's emotional and spiritual needs while in social isolation.

Team members and their backgrounds are:

- Colleen Clark, Lawyer, Public Health, Chair of the Worship and Music Team
- Jim Potts, Technology Manager
- Lynn Black, Forensic Scientist / Medical Technologist, Chair of the Outreach Team
- Michael Reames, HR Director at Dick Smith Auto, and Co-Chair of the Fellowship Team
- Michelle Couri, Dialysis Technician, working toward a Nursing degree
- Sabra Custer, Nurse Practitioner in infectious diseases, associate professor at UofSC College of Nursing
- Wendell Gullledge, Assistant Director of the Immunization Division at DHEC
- Sam Ruff, Retired Treasurer and Property Chair
- Ginny Eiwen, Congregation President, Transition Team Chair
- Pastor Tim Bupp

The Team has reviewed information from the CDC and local and national governments, from our insurance provider, as well as from diverse religious bodies to help us arrive at recommendations for how and when we may again all gather safely for worship, study, fellowship, and sacraments.

DHEC data posted at <https://scdhec.gov/covid19/south-carolina-county-level-data-covid-19>, indicated that as of February 25, 2021, Richland, Lexington, and Kershaw counties all completed six weeks of decline in Covid-19 case counts.

II. Benchmarks for Resuming Public Gatherings

Based on information reviewed, Reformation's Transition Team recommends adherence to the following benchmarks for resuming worship gatherings of various sizes¹.

Each benchmark must be satisfied before moving to the next level. Increases in reported cases mean a return to the previous level.

¹ From *Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic*, published by The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments, which is endorsed by the United Methodist-Evangelical Lutheran Church in American Full Communion Coordinating Committee, and is available at [Resuming Care-Filled Worship](#)

Beginning Criteria	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19 for two consecutive weeks	A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19 for two MORE consecutive weeks	A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19 for two MORE consecutive weeks	An ongoing downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19.

III. Recommended Maximum Size For Gatherings

The benchmarks involve both state and local public health conditions and the readiness of states and local communities to provide testing, appropriate health care, and follow-up with people who may have been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. As long as we follow these individual hygiene requirements, the size of social gatherings with an acceptable level of risk gradually increases:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Social gatherings of up to 10 with 6-foot distance and face coverings Except for: Persons over 65, or with serious underlying health conditions: high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised.	Social gatherings of up to 50 with 6-foot distance and face coverings Except for: Persons over 65, or with serious underlying health conditions: high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised.	Social gatherings of over 50 with 6-foot distance and face coverings Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing, and minimize exposure to settings where distancing may not be practical.

Other factors to consider include:

- Length of interactions (the shorter the better)
- Size of room
- Indoor versus outdoor activities (outdoor is generally less risky)
- Air circulation (open air is generally less risky)

These general guidelines apply at every level:

- Stay at home if you are sick, and self-quarantine if you think you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces.
- Use cloth face coverings while in public. Children under 2, those with breathing problems, and those who are unable to remove a mask on their own should not wear face coverings.

Each benchmark must be satisfied before moving to the next level. Increases in reported cases mean a return to the previous level.

Based on conditions in Richland, Lexington, and Kershaw counties as of March 11, 2021, the Team - believes that we can move to Level 2, resuming in person worship for groups of up to 50 participants on May 2, 2021.

IV. Things We are Doing Now, Prior to Being able to Resume In Person Activities

- A. Streaming the Sunday Worship Service via FaceBook Live, with Pastor, the music director, two vocalists, and the camera operator in the Sanctuary
 1. This group has led Services and limited travel outside their homes since mid-March.
 2. They maintain distancing and other precautions during the service broadcast.
 3. A lector and, on occasion, a third vocalist have also participated in the Service.
- B. Daily Devotion, by Pastor is also streamed via FaceBook Live every week Monday through Thursday
- C. Pastor Tim led a six-week Bible Study on the Book of Mark using Zoom
- D. Stewardship for All Seasons campaign was successfully completed, including Temple Talks during worship, mailings with educational information and Intention to Give Forms, and participation in Zoom Council meetings.
- E. Pastoral Care visits. (These are not recommended inside homes, hospitals, or nursing care centers except for very brief times and only when most necessary, such as near death. Outdoor meetings such as on porches or in yards while maintaining physical distancing, wearing face masks, and avoiding touching can be very helpful.)
- F. An institutional Zoom account was provided by a member of the congregation allowing meetings to run longer than 40 minutes starting in May, 2020.
- G. Pastor and Council prioritized an every member contact, connecting via phone, note, emails with as many members and regular visitors as possible.
- H. Wednesday morning Bible Study resumed via Zoom on July 29, 2020.
- I. Members were encouraged to participate in ‘on line communion’ during our streamed services on a regular schedule beginning in August 2020. Everyone used their own bread and wine at home.
- J. Adult Sunday School resumed via Zoom on September 20, 2020.
- K. Zoom Happy Hours were begun on October 16, 2020, and continued to occur on the third Friday of each month.
- L. A new Committee structure was introduced in the Zoom Annual Meeting on November 8, 2020. Committees were staffed, and Committee leaders joined Council in a planning retreat in January, 2021. Committees began regular Zoom meetings in January, 2021.
- M. Drive In Worship Services in the church parking lot began on November 22, 2020, with Communion available by sealed, disposable individual bread and wine containers.
- N. New procedures for Counting Offerings were defined and implemented in January 2021.

- O. Pastor Tim with the support of several members conducted extensive research to help improve the quality of live-streamed worship services.

V. Activities in Planning While We Wait to Meet the ‘Next Criteria’

- A. Implementing interactive methods to help us feel connected outside the building during this “new normal,” including:
 - 1. Fostering community, through offering small discussion and education groups on line, encouraging people to watch the Service in small groups via Zoom, or to add, pot-luck dinners, or sharing sessions. Use Small Group materials from the ELCA or other churches
 - 2. Recording Services on DVDs and deliver them to members without internet access using the Mevo Camera
 - 3. Contacting family / friends of homebound members and encouraging them to help members watch Services
- B. Week-day distribution of pre-recorded offerings from our musicians through social media.
- C. Preparation for establishment of Small Group Ministry
 - 1. Researching materials for groups’ use
 - 2. Recruiting and training leaders
 - 3. Preparing publicity materials
- D. More outreach targeted to our children
- E. Getting our ‘new’ Fellowship Hall space ready for occupancy and determining how to best utilize the spaces.

VI. New Ministry Ideas Under Consideration While We Wait to Meet the ‘Beginning Criteria’

- A. Improve the quality of our streaming Service video and audio
 - 1. Better sound quality and closer images of worship leaders
 - 2. Pre-recorded segments with attractive visuals, readings or singing from other locations
 - 3. Different liturgies, using less singing, in preparation for resuming in person worship
- B. Offer assistance to those in the congregation without internet and devices at home, either as a church or individual to individual
- C. Add music and additional programs through end of year, such as Reformation 95, Christmas
- D. Discuss ways to increase congregational involvement in Daily Devotions, including having members share Devotions

VII. Level 1 (First Open for Gatherings of Up To 10)

- A. Will look much like what we are doing today, including social distancing and use of face coverings
- B. Level 1 gatherings could include:
 - 1. Worship Leaders only present for Streamed Sunday Service
 - 2. Counters to count and deposit checks and other offerings received
 - 3. Small Bible Studies or other small in person groups meeting on the church property or in homes
 - 4. Music (instrumental) rehearsals or worship planning sessions
 - 5. Weekly Staff Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings
- C. All high-touch surfaces should be disinfected on a daily basis
- D. Tissues, trashcans and sanitizer should be available at all entry/exit doors and in restrooms.

VIII. Level 2 (Gatherings of Up To 50) — What Might This Look Like?

- A. We would live-stream the 10:00 Service with music by soloists only and current small number of leaders. The 11:30 Drive In Service would be discontinued.
 - 1. Piano, organ, string, or non-wind instruments only
 - 2. Sparing use of responsorials, emphasize no “loud” responses and no singing
 - 3. Encourage non-vocal participation - hand clapping, tapping thighs, sign language
 - 4. No-touch, stationary passing of the peace, maintaining social distancing
 - 5. Consider expanded use of silence
 - 6. Communion elements in a disposable container with a wafer and wine will be handed to worshipers as they enter the Sanctuary
- B. Top headcount in Service, including Worship Leaders would be 50 people.
- C. All worshipers and leaders would wear masks and practice social distancing.
- D. We could consider adding Worship viewing in the Fellowship Hall to a limited attendance or hosting small watch parties in classrooms in the Fellowship Hall. (This would require development of Small Group Use Guidelines, including instructions on how to reserve a room and cleaning instructions after use.)
- E. We may use different worship locations. Because longer exposure indoors increases the risk of transmitting the virus, briefer worship services are better. Outdoor services may be better than indoor.
- F. There would be NO:
 - 1. Greeting line at the end of the Service
 - 2. Nursery
 - 3. In person Sunday School
 - 4. Coffee or snacks

- G. We would have announcements at the beginning of each Service reminding us to regard signage, etc
- H. We could implement the plan for when and how to resume outside group use of the building, including being a voting location in November, PFLAG, Midlands Mens Chorus, PRIDE activities in October (including the traditional luncheon at Reformation), etc.

IX. Planning and Implementations Necessary Before We Move to Level 2 (Gatherings of up to 50)

A. Ensuring Available Safe Space

- 1. Anyone wishing to attend a service in person must call the church office to reserve spots. Fifty ‘spots’ including worship leaders will be allowed at any in person service. In the future, determine the need for an automated/online ‘reservation’ option.
- 2. Consider a ‘soft start’ — inviting volunteers who are not in any high-risk categories to initial services, allowing for a few unplanned worshippers
- 3. Post attendant signage (Available from the CDC and DHEC)
- 4. Plan how to communicate this to the congregation and on our website

B. Masks

- 1. “We wear face coverings in worship during the pandemic so we can love our neighbors as ourselves. . . . We can take comfort in knowing that nothing can hide or separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39)”
- 2. All worshipers / attendees **MUST** wear a mask covering the nose and mouth
- 3. Worship leaders should wear masks as much as possible. (Consider rehearsing leading, including preaching while wearing a mask.)
- 4. We must provide clear advance notification that masks are required and request that masks be applied when attendees exit their vehicles
- 5. Masks will be provided for anyone who doesn’t have one
 - a) We will purchase disposable masks to use first
 - b) We will ask members to make and bring (washed) masks to the church for distribution
 - c) We will station mask distribution volunteers at points away from sanctuary
- 6. Persons who won’t wear a mask will be referred to the on line service

C. Detailed Seating Plan

- 1. Max capacity for each Service will be 50 persons to begin. We may be able to safely seat 40 - 80 people depending on size of groups, 19 pews down each side. (Pews are exactly 36” apart.)
- 2. Start seating at least 16 feet away from worship leaders since they may sometimes need to use louder voices.
- 3. Plan seating in light of the service being live-streamed, i.e., allow room for video equipment, etc.

4. Ribbon and/or tape, Sights and Sounds ‘boards’ for delineating open rows
5. Max two household groups (families, couples, etc.) every other pew, staggered sides
6. Plan space for families that allows children space to move.
7. Front-to-back distance more important from “spray” point of view, but at least 6 feet in all directions between families or co-isolating groups
8. Identify exceptions for larger family groups who are co-isolating (e.g., Ritchies)
9. Leave a few spaces open so visitors may join

D. Offering

1. Collecting - Offering plates or box at Narthex table or near Chancel/Altar (no passing)
2. Counting - Use counting procedures begun in January 2021.

E. Communion will utilize disposable individual packets handed out as attendees enter the Sanctuary.

F. Cleaning Protocols (for high touch surfaces including pews, doors)

1. Checklists for Levi and for Ushers’ use
2. Ensure Hand sanitizer / masks available at entry point, near door to bathrooms.
3. Make sure soap, spray cleaner and towels in restrooms
4. Purchase adequate supplies of sanitizer
5. Worship leaders shall disinfect their hands in full sight of the congregation to help the congregation feel at ease about things the leaders will touch. This communicates to the congregation that, “This matters!”

G. What if someone gets sick during service?

1. Remove to breezeway (weather permitting) or nursery (assure ushers have keys)?
2. Call 911 or other escort?

H. What if someone is identified as COVID positive after attending a church activity?

1. Research if/how we need to notify the congregation. Criteria for self-isolation may be contact of greater than 10 minutes, at less than six feet distance within two days of symptoms appearing.
2. Prepare to close / quarantine, get supply pastor if needed

X. Preparing Our Building for Level 2 (Gatherings of up to 50)

A. Prepare the Sanctuary Area

1. Empty Baptismal Fonts
2. Remove:
 - a) All pew materials (hymnals, cards, pencils, etc).
 - b) Pew cushions
 - c) Random information, non-Bulletin materials, candy, etc., in narthex, pews, halls
 - d) All items from bathroom except TP rolls, paper towels, deodorizers, cleaners

B. Repair the pink bathroom door; It’s hard to open, creates more touch than necessary

- C. Review air circulation / HVAC status and repair or plan alternate building / grounds usage if circulation is inadequate
- D. Obtain / create and post signage with the following information:
 - 1. Good hygiene practices (available from DHEC, CDC)²
 - 2. Regarding symptoms
 - 3. Don't show up all at once
 - 4. Leave in staggered groups (not all at once after sending hymn)
 - 5. Discourage but not prohibit bathroom usage
 - 6. "Love your neighbor but don't touch them"
 - 7. Enter and exit only through front doors / side door to breeze way unless need ADA access through Fellowship Hall
 - 8. No Nursery
- E. Define Cleaning Protocols (for high touch surfaces including pews, doors)
 - 1. Checklists for Levi and for Ushers' use
 - 2. Ensure Hand sanitizer / masks available at entry point, near door to bathrooms.
 - 3. Make sure soap, spray cleaner and towels in restrooms
 - 4. Purchase adequate supplies of sanitizer
- F. Mark the ground outdoors in front of doors, and in aisles and routes to restrooms indoors at 6-foot intervals
- G. Place wastebaskets, tissues, and sanitizer at all entry/exit doors, in restrooms, and in the Sanctuary

XI. Preparing Assistants and Worship Leaders for Level 2 (Gatherings of up to 50)

- A. Train Ushers
 - 1. Four Ushers per Service; Open all internal and external doors (weather permitting) in the Sanctuary and at the Narthex before Service
 - 2. No mask, no entry. Ushers to enforce proper use of a mask.
 - 3. Usher at Fellowship Hall door for those who cannot use stairs, direct all others to front / main doors
 - 4. All attendees will be directed by an Usher to select open seating according to social distancing guidelines and seating plan
 - 5. All attendees will receive disposable individual communion packet from Ushers as they enter the Sanctuary and will be instructed by Pastor as to when to open them.
 - 6. All attendees will be released to exit at the end of the service by ushers. Pastor will encourage attendees to gather (socially distanced) outside without blocking passage of other attendees (use the lawn as necessary)
 - 7. Cleaning Checklist review (ex., Wipe or spray handles, tables, pews frequently with provided Lysol / Clorox wipes)

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

8. Cleaning Supplies will be stocked in bathrooms, with attendees asked to clean after each use. Train Lectors, Musicians, and Altar Guild
9. Positioning
10. Masks
11. Sanitary preparation of elements when we resume Communion

XII. Preparing the Congregation for Level 2 (Gatherings of up to 50)

- A. Announce that worship gatherings are going to resume and what to expect in them - one month in advance if possible
 1. Number of people who can attend to keep everyone safe
 2. Changes to entry and exits
 3. How seating will work
 4. Safety measures in place
 5. Service changes
 6. Nursery (none), and Zoom Sunday School, and Fellowship changes
 7. Emphasize how changes help us fulfill our mission and values
 8. Note that changes in the number of COVID cases will impact ongoing worship and other gatherings
- B. Create materials to emphasize via Bulletin and website that people must self-check
 1. Emphasize in Messaging: *Attend if you feel comfortable* - Sample text from another church: *“Our decision to open the sanctuary for Sunday worship does NOT MEAN it is a good idea for YOU to come to worship. We encourage you to listen to your doctors, your family, your friends, and public health professionals to decide whether or not public worship is a wise option for you at this time.”*
 2. Do not come to church if you feel sick or have been in contact with someone who is sick.
 3. By attending a Service in person, you agree 1. that you may appear on the livestream and 2. that the congregation can be notified that exposure could have happened at a Service you attended if you become sick

XIII. Preparations for Level 3 (Gatherings of over 50)

- A. New Worship attendance limits
- B. Adding / Changing Communion practices - bread, wafers, wine?
- C. Assuming Level 3 will include Nursery and Children’s Church resumption, plan for how to resume including in person activities for children
 1. Add a separate Family Worship?
 2. How to do education?
- D. Plan to expand small group ministry