

COMING TOGETHER AGAIN

Reopening the Church

Like every other part of our society, we as a church must decide when we will return to meeting in person and what process we will follow. The following principles are guiding the thinking of the elders and staff at this point in time.

1. We want to keep the welfare of our congregation as a top priority. There may be disagreements about the specifics among our members, but we must have a plan we can all follow.
2. Respect and be considerate of those whose opinions differ from your own. Show love toward one another by being considerate of the weak. Act at your own comfort level.
3. Recognize there will be many adjustments to new ways of doing things, some temporary, some permanent for the foreseeable future.
4. As Christians, we are to respect and obey the ruling authorities. They are put in place by God for the common welfare and to bring order. As long as they are fulfilling their godly purposes of punishing evil and rewarding good, we should follow their guidelines. There is much still unknown about this illness and its progression. Our governmental officials are adjusting as information becomes available. Their goal is what is best for the general public, and that is somewhat a moving target.
5. Church life does not stop because we are doing things differently. Members are encouraged to show care and concern for one another. We also have a tremendous opportunity to show love to our neighbors who do not know Christ. Many are fearful, weary, anxious and angry. They may be laid off from their jobs. They are facing all this without hope in Christ. If you are aware of needs around you, please let us know so we can respond to them with Christ's love.
6. We want to provide a positive witness to the community. Any rash actions that are seen as endangering our neighbors are unloving.
7. We want to see this disease come to an end. We don't want to be the source of an infection hotspot, nor do we want to start over again by closing down once we start up.

Phases—Most authorities suggest the reopening of the country, including churches, should be done in some sort of a phased action. It is hard to know timing at this point, but Minnesota is still under a stay at home order and COVID-19 cases are not expected to peak until after the end of May. With two weeks of declining cases following that, we would be looking at mid-June at the earliest for reconvening in person at our building. Others have suggested this might not happen until July or August. The ultimate goal is to get everyone back in church and to have online services on a continuing basis for those who cannot be here. The elders will be watching the situation carefully before making any decision about the timing of our reopening, but we anticipate the phases will resemble the following.

Phase 1--Totally online

This is what we have been doing for two months. Since we may be in this phase for a while, we are considering adding more adult education opportunities. We will continue with youth & children as is. Since they are not meeting in person, Isaac is leading the youth in various Zoom meetings. Children's teachers are distributing materials to parents to help them teach. We also have a weekly children's bulletin. Children's sermons are presented each Sunday. Members

are encouraged to love their neighbors in tangible ways and to check on other members through emails or phone calls. The Thursday night Zoom prayer meeting will also continue.

Phase 2—Online, with modifications (could be implemented as soon as the “stay at home” order is lifted, perhaps by May 24, 2020)

Encourage people to host watch parties in their homes, to which they would invite up to ten family members/church members/neighbors to view the service and worship and fellowship with them. It is also possible to experiment safely with a drive-in service using a low-wattage FM transmitter.

Phase 3--In person, with entire service also continuing online (perhaps by mid-June)

Vulnerable individuals (over 70 and/or underlying health conditions) would be advised to stay home. Those who are ill or have potential exposure to COVID-19 would be asked to stay home and seek treatment and testing. Those meeting in the church building would practice social distancing. We will determine the seating capacity of our auditorium and foyer using social distancing. We may need to offer multiple services if necessary to accommodate the congregation. Services will likely be shorter than normal to minimize exposure time. We could possibly meet outdoors part of the time. There would be no coffee fellowship and no children’s ministry. The nursery would be available for nursing mothers or as a cry room. Parents of young children would be asked to supervise them for the protection of others. (See some specific “common welfare” practices below).

Phase 4--In person with fewer restrictions (date unknown, perhaps fall)

Restoration of children’s ministry and midweek activities (with certain restrictions to continue), in order to maintain safety while returning to a more “normal” practice. Online services would continue on a permanent basis.

For our common welfare:

1. Greeters will not shake hands, but will open doors and give a warm welcome. Bulletins will be distributed by a gloved greeter, emailed in advance and projected during the pre-service time.
2. Those attending should not shake hands.
3. Everyone present over the age of 2 will be asked to wear a cloth mask for the protection of others. A limited number of masks will be available for those without.
4. Windows and doors will be open as feasible to provide plenty of outside air circulation.
5. Those attending will be asked to practice handwashing or the use of hand sanitizer, and advised not to touch their faces. Hand sanitizing station will be at the front door. Water fountains will not be available.
6. We will practice social distancing in seating, utilizing every other row. Family members from the same household may sit together, but others should keep a 6’ distance. We will also provide seating in the foyer with similar spacing. Tables will be removed to minimize contaminated hard surfaces.
7. People will be asked to vacate the building as soon as possible following the service, with visiting occurring outside.

8. We will not pass offering plates or communion. Communion will be served at stations. Those waiting to participate will be asked to maintain a 6' distance designated by tape strips on the floor.. Communion will be served with the juice and bread in stacked cups. Those who need assistance will indicate by raising their hand and a server will bring a tray to them. Masks may be removed long enough for worshipers to participate in communion. Offering plates will be at stations or people can continue to give by mail or electronic means. We may also install a locked offering box.
9. Those leading worship will wear masks when not on the platform.
10. At this point, we do not plan to take people's temperatures, but signage at the doors will remind people that they should not enter if they are experiencing symptoms of illness.
11. Anyone who shows symptoms within three days of attending a service should contact office administrator Amy McGinnis ASAP to aid in contact tracing in the event of an outbreak. We will take a camera shot of each service to help with this process.
12. Adequate cleaning will be done each week according to a checklist to sanitize "high-touch" surfaces.