

Dear members of Lutheran Church of the Cross,

The other day President Trump deemed church an essential service. As much as I appreciate the Presidents response and his enthusiasm to return our lives to a pre Covid 19 society we are not ready yet. I know that we all want to return to church, we want to see our friends, we want to celebrate the sacraments together, we want to sing familiar hymns, but in order to love our neighbors we need to be to make sure that we keep our church safe through proper cleaning, social distancing, and

For the last month I have been in consultation with the synod, local congregations, health officials, and our congregational council. We have come up with a 5 phase plan to reopen our church following guidelines set up from the CDC, Minnesota Department of Health, ELCA. The timing for the shifts from stage to stage will be informed by limitations and dates set by the Governor, the State Department of Health, and Center for Disease Control and our own Smart Team (Executive Church Council, Dr. Roger Macy, Dr. Nancy Henry-Socha, and RN Pam Johnson). So this plan is subject to change.

We also recognize that stepping in to these stages might be a “back and forth” process. Depending on recommendations, we may need to move backwards before moving forward again.

The criteria used to develop this plan include:

1. Fulfilling the mission to which:

God has called Lutheran Church of the Cross to welcome all people into discipleship with Jesus Christ through: Prayer, Scripture reading, Worship, Service in Christ's Name, Stewardship, and Hospitality.

2. The safety and well-being of our congregation and community.

3. The desire of our congregation to be “together” again.

4. The stability and sustainability of the congregation.

Stage 1

Effective since March

- Office Manager will work out of the main office
- Other staff will be in the building only as needed
- Volunteers for food ministry in and out as needed
- Otherwise, building still closed and unused areas that have been sanitized will remain sealed off
- Worship will continue via live-streaming
- Members of our community are encouraged to continue personal preparedness, by washing hands, avoiding touching our faces, etc...
- Physically vulnerable individuals are strongly encouraged to stay home
- Staff and parishioners will be expected to wear masks when interacting with others in close proximity
- The staff will create a team to set expectations and a process for moving to Stage 2
- The staff will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward, and the Smart Team, staff and Council will make the decision when to move to stage 2

Stage 2

Lutheran Church of the Cross's office will reopen when:

- Lutheran Church of the Cross's building will reopen on a limited basis
- While staff may continue working from home, they are also welcome to work in their office space
- Small group meetings allowed, up to Governor's limits on group sizes & social distancing
- Members of our community are encouraged to continue personal preparedness, by washing hands, avoiding touching our faces, etc...
- Physically vulnerable individuals are strongly encouraged to stay home
- Staff and parishioners will be expected to wear masks when interacting with others in close proximity (as per the Dept. of Health recommendations)
- LCC's meeting rooms will be sanitized immediately after use
- LCC's outside ministries will resume work on evenings when there are groups scheduled
- LCC's staff will create a team to set expectations and process for Stage 3
- We will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward
- LCC congregational council, Smart Team, and staff will make the decision when to move to stage 3

Stage 3

- Face-to face worship resumes (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor, including wearing masks)
- We will add a third worship service to enable better social distancing. New times will be 8:15, 9:30 and 10:45am.
- We will practice social distancing in worship. We will seat the congregation every other row. At the first and third services the congregation will sit in the odd rows. And at the second service the congregation will be able to sit in even rows. This will allow us to clean and air the pews out before the next services.
- Communion is served using strict safety protocols
- Hymnals and Bibles will be removed from Sanctuary. Instead, we will print all necessary materials on paper for one-time usage.
- Congregational singing would depend on current recommendations from MN Dept. of Health
- We will receive our offering in plates set by the doors, to avoid passing possibly contaminated plates.
- Children are welcome to worship with their families
 - Nursery care will not yet be available
 - A Special Children's church will be available at 9:30 in our Celebration Center
- Those who are physically vulnerable to the virus are asked to continue staying at home and worshipping online
- Members of our community are encouraged to continue personal preparedness, by washing hands, avoiding touching our faces, etc...
- Staff and parishioners will be expected to wear masks when interacting with others in close proximity (as per the Dept. of Health recommendations)
- Other large events in the building may resume (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor)
- Food service for these events will not be available yet
- Weddings and funerals can resume (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor)
- Sunday school, Route 56 and confirmation resume (within the limitations of group size & social distancing set by the Governor)
- The staff will create a team to set expectations and process for Stage 4
- We will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward
- Smart Team, LCC staff and Council will make the decision when to move to stage 4

Stage 4

- Large events that include food service may resume
- Wednesday night dinners may be served face-to-face
- Sunday morning donuts and coffee resume
- The staff will create team to set expectations and process for Stage 5
- We will continue to consult with local medical experts as we move forward
- We will continue to seek input from other community organizations (Brainerd School District and Pequot Lakes School District, other congregations, etc...)
- Smart Team, LCC staff and Council will make the decision when to move to stage 5

Stage 5

- LCC's programming will resume as normal
- Nursery/childcare available during worship

We are excited to see everyone again. In the midst of this planning, however, we need to acknowledge that the world has changed, and that even when we are past this health crisis, our ministry will have moved into a new stage. And while this creates some uncertainty, and maybe even anxiety, we remain firm in our belief that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Not life, nor death, nor angels, nor rulers..." nor Covid-19, nor quarantine... "nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

We don't anticipate simply moving back to "what it was," rather we look forward to a new and stronger future.

Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your commitment to the wellbeing of others in the community, and thank you for being the church, wherever you are. In closing I am reminded of a post from Tom Terney:

Our Church is **open**.

Open to patience and wisdom.

Open to science and common sense.

Open to discovering new ways to connect when it is unsafe to “do it the way we’ve always done it.

Open to saving lives by giving up some of the traditions and sacraments we hold dear.

Open to wearing masks to show we love our neighbor.

Open to keeping the sanctuary closed so more of us can come back together safely when it is time.

Our church is **open** to following Jesus who, himself, spent time in the wilderness.

We will remain **open**, and someday, by the grace of God, we will be able to worship together again.

Blessings,
Pastor Drew