

Background:

Out of love for our neighbor, especially the most vulnerable, the goal of this plan is to minimize the opportunity for community spread of COVID-19 at Ascension Lutheran Church. In establishing these guidelines for congregation life at Ascension, Pastor Christina and your congregation council have carefully considered:

- legally binding orders
- the safety of the community and congregation
- recommendations from health officials
- recommendations from the NC Synod staff
- potential liability and insurance issues
- following state guidelines and federal guidelines for opening.

Before we gather, we will produce and install clear signage that describes church policies and best hygiene practices and map clear routes of movement from the entryway into the worship space, and plan ways to maintain physical distancing while people move along those routes.

Ascension Lutheran Church Shelby, NC

Policy and Procedures

Subject: Congregation Re-Gathering
Effective Date: 06/1/2020

Issued by: Congregation Council

Revised: 10/26/2020

PRECAUTIONS

We will not be screening employees or visitors, but we encourage everyone to be aware of COVID-19 symptoms and the chance that you could be asymptomatic. We strongly encourage wearing a non-medical face covering when in the same room as another person.

COVID-19 Symptoms:

Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms or combinations of symptoms may have COVID-19:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Or at least two of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

If you think you may have been exposed to COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider immediately. Most people have mild illness and are able to recover at home. If you have been at church and you become sick, please notify Pastor Christina. She will work with local health officials to follow up on next steps. Individual names will not be released to the congregation.

WORSHIP

Anyone experiencing symptoms named above is requested to stay home. Vulnerable populations or anyone afraid to come to worship also are encouraged to stay home from in-person worship and continue participating in remote worship via Zoom or Facebook Live. The video recording is also shared on YouTube and the audio recording is archived on FreeConferenceCall; both are also available on the website.

“Vulnerable Individuals” are defined as people over 65 years of age, people with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, or asthma, and people whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy.

Only one entrance, the one on the northside of the sanctuary, next to the lift, will be unlocked to enter the building, in order to manage, plan and maintain guidelines. The entrance closest to the columbarium will remain locked. The education building will remain locked.

A mask-wearing usher will greet worshipers and attend to the lift. An usher will open the doors to the building and the sanctuary. Ushers will also direct worshipers row by row to exit at the end of worship.

Worshipers are requested to wear non-medical face coverings over their mouth and nose when in the same room as another person.

Worshipers are requested to sanitize hands upon entering the building. Sanitizer is available in the narthex, in the pews and in the restrooms.

Worshipers are asked to maintain social distancing between people of different households.

Seating capacity in the sanctuary will be reduced. Allowable seating areas will be marked. Thirty (30) people can socially distance in the sanctuary, including the pastor and one musician.

Bulletins will be placed on the pews ahead of time.

No one will be seated in the choir loft or serving as acolyte or crucifer.

The font will remain empty and covered.

Pew cushions, hymnals, Bibles and kids’ bags will all be removed from the sanctuary and narthex. The guest register, prayer concern request forms and extra envelopes will also be removed.

While we will continue to have worship music, we will not be singing hymns. Singing together, even from a distance, is one of the riskiest behaviors due to the spread of aerosol and droplets that can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air. A cloth mask is unlikely to protect you or your neighbor.

Tithes and offerings will not be collected by passing a collection plate from person-to-person. We will have stationary offering plates near the entrance to the sanctuary and we have online and text to give options.

Regular tabulators will not resume responsibilities yet. Instead the process that has been used since March 15 to count and deposit receipts will continue.

Worship will be abbreviated and it will not include any processions or recessions, including the offering procession. Worship will not include sharing the peace.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion will be offered with pre-packaged elements. Please wear your mask until it is time to receive the elements, and then wear your mask again after reception.

Following the dismissal at the end of the service, worshipers should exit the building, maintaining social distancing. If worshipers choose to visit outside, please maintain social distancing.

There will not be a greeting line, coffee, food or fellowship time.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Any activities held in the church buildings or on the church property must follow best practices during the pandemic, including wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, no singing and no eating.

Virtual meetings by teleconferencing (i.e. Zoom) for all church-related activities will continue. Special celebrations, including baptisms and confirmation, are postponed indefinitely.

BUILDING SANITATION

All high touch surfaces - door handles, hand rails, light switches, entrances, bathrooms and pews - will be sanitized before/after each service.

Dates/Times when spaces were last sanitized will be documented and posted in that space.

Most common spaces and rooms in the buildings remain closed. This includes the nursery, classrooms, the kitchen, the downstairs chapel and the choir room. You are asked not to congregate in the narthex.

Please prepare for restroom distancing. The restrooms will need to be used by one person at a time in order to maintain proper physical distancing.

Water fountains should not be used and will have signage to remind worshipers they are not available.