

Zion Lutheran Church, Long Valley, NJ

Returning to in-person Worship

Date/Location

Council met on Tuesday, 6/16 and approved the recommendations of the Reopening Task Group, including resuming in-person worship services on **Sunday June 28** in the **outdoor worship space** if the weather permits AND if the technology setup permits simultaneous broadcast on YouTube. Relocation to Faith Hall will be discussed at the Council's July 21 meeting.

In case of inclement weather, worship will be live-streamed on YouTube as it has been since March. A decision regarding weather suitability would be announced no later than Saturday morning via the website and Facebook, just as we do for snowy Sundays.

Foundation of recommendations

The recommendations of the Reopening Task Group are grounded in the love of the neighbor; in short, how can we keep our neighbor as safe as possible when resuming in-person gatherings? Not only did Jesus teach that the two greatest commandments were loving God and loving the neighbor (Mark 12), but when writing to congregations in Galatia, the Apostle Paul intimates that faith is how the Christian loves God, and that loving the neighbor is a natural outcome of faith, *"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Galatians 5)

Summary of Congregational Survey (84 responses)

- The survey responses revealed that most wish to take a cautious approach to resuming in person worship and recognize the need for everyone to take some precautions like wearing masks, avoiding direct physical contact and sitting in a socially distanced manner.
- The preferred location for starting to return to in-person worship is the outdoor chapel.
- Concerns were expressed regarding how individuals who fail to follow or refuse to follow safe practices would be dealt with as they jeopardize the safety of the entire group assembled and also how communion might be celebrated under these conditions.
- Many respondents wished to continue the availability of live-stream worship.

Assumptions

Mechanisms of COVID-19 transmission - primarily through respiratory droplets (breathing, speaking, singing, coughing, sneezing) and, less likely, surface contact by infected. Both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals are contagious. Latest report shows people may transmit the virus up to 5 days before symptoms appear.ⁱ

Zion should not be ahead of local, state, federal governmental authority regulations/guidelines – and we could lag, if we thought it prudent. Council received general legal advice from members and our insurance company, suggesting that following governmental guidelinesⁱⁱ means that we have a lower chance of receiving a lawsuit for negligence around COVID-19.

Guidelines

- **Illness** - Individuals who do not feel well should stay home
- **Masks** - All attendees, including worship leaders, will be required to wear a mask. Currently, this is required by the state of NJ; however, it also reduces the risk of spread of coronavirus by those who are pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic ^{**iii}
 - Masks will be available for those who forget to bring their own

**ELCA Recommended Guidelines

- **One-way pathways** will be used to enter and exit the worship space. When indoors, doors will be propped open to minimize person-to-person and surface contacts **
- **Hand sanitizer and disinfectant surface wipes** will be available in the worship areas** especially indoors
- **Seating** in all worship spaces will follow social distancing guidelines** which recommend a minimum of 6 feet between individuals not from the same family group. Seating will be marked for easy identification (e.g. by tape or bulletin) iv
- **Singing** – It was agreed with regret that worship will occur without singing by the congregation or individuals. Based on available scientific evidence regarding virus spread via aerosolization during vocalization (especially singing) and deep breathing, the service should be conducted without singing; that would be unsafe even with mask use**. Hymns will be played and the congregation can follow along.
 - Instrumental music (excluding wind instruments) or prerecorded vocal music is welcomed**
 - Bell choir practice and participation in worship is welcomed with appropriate social distancing and face coverings
- **Bulletins** - will not be reused and people should take them home after each service. Parishioners are welcome to print their own materials at home, if desired (from the website). Text projection might be helpful when returning indoors. All books will be removed from pews in the sanctuary before worship is resumed there.
- **Offering** - An offering receptacle will be available along the entry or exit pathway into which people can securely place their offering. We will not use offering plates so as to avoid passing an object between multiple hands**
- **Sharing the peace of the Lord** – The natural desire to face one another and touch one another in greeting will be difficult to resist, but since this is an important aspect of worship at Zion, we will continue to share the peace without moving from our seats. Options: Eye contact, hand gesture, and one suggestion was to clap our hands!
- **Holy Communion** – Knowing how many desire to receive Communion, it was agreed with regret that celebration of Holy Communion would not be resumed initially until there is more opportunity to assess appropriate safety precautions as well as celebrating the sacrament in accordance with best practices that are consistent and communicate Lutheran teachings, especially around the understanding of Communion as an in-person communal experience.
- **Rest rooms-** We'll use Faith Hall (when worshipping outdoors or in Faith Hall) and open the Education wing restrooms (when worshipping in the sanctuary)
 - Limited to one user at a time (or one household at a time)** to avoid close contact and permit use of both rooms as gender neutral to maximize availability
 - Doors to stalls will be propped open to minimize need to touch handles
 - Disinfectant wipes will be available as we can find them.
 - Paper towels will be provided in both facilities so that users can dry their hands and then use the towel to open the door to exit the restroom, and place the towel in a trash bin outside the bathroom door
- **Contact Tracing** - A photograph of the group at each service will be taken by the usher in case subsequent contact tracing is necessary to identify attendees
- **Refusal to follow guidelines** - At each worship service, participants will be reminded of the need to be respectful of the concerns and safety of others and that the guidelines are grounded in love and concern for the neighbor. If anyone attending worship refuses to follow these guidelines (e.g. removal of their mask), Pastor will offer a prayer and then dismiss the assembly so as not to jeopardize everyone's health and safety by commencing worship. If many people refuse to follow guidelines, we will resume live-stream worship.
- **Potential worship schedule modifications-** The need for multiple services to keep attendance from exceeding capacity will be addressed before we move indoors

Council wishes to thank the Reopening Task Group for their work!

ⁱ The sub-clinical infectious period for SARS-CoV2 is estimated to be as large as 5 days. Meaning, you look and feel fine for those 5 days, but you are actively shedding the virus into the environment. The authors estimate that 44% of all infections happen in this sub-clinical/pre-symptomatic infectious window. **Nature Medicine** 4/15/2020

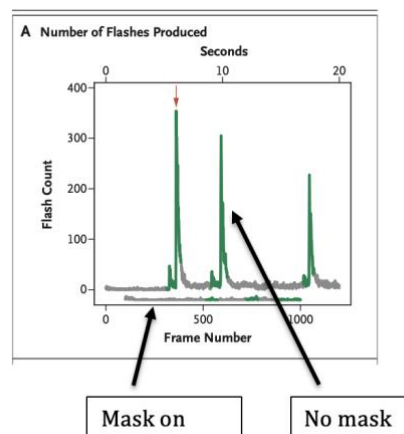
ⁱⁱ Summary of **NJ Executive Order 152**, June 9:

- Outdoor gatherings limited to 100 persons*
- Social distancing of 6 feet required at all times between attendees except for members of same family group/household, caregivers or romantic partners and gathering organizer*
- No contact between attendees other than for health or safety (same exceptions as above) *
- No physical items or equipment may be shared between attendees at the same gathering unless sanitized between individuals*
- All attendees must wear face coverings at all times (attendees may remove their masks momentarily to place something in their mouth for health or religious purposes)
- Indoor gatherings limited to 25 percent of building capacity or 50 persons

**These restrictions do not apply to outdoor religious gatherings or political activity, i.e. protests*

ⁱⁱⁱ Recently published studies have shown that merely speaking releases respiratory droplets that spread up to several feet and are of sufficient size to harbor coronavirus and that these droplets can linger locally for up to 14-40 minutes. Release of such droplets during normal volume speaking is blocked by wearing a cloth face covering. There are many documented super-spreading cases connected with activities – like singing – that can create a lot of droplets. Masks are very good at blocking larger droplets but not nearly as good at blocking tiny particles. When a person expels droplets into the air, they quickly evaporate and shrink to become tiny airborne particles called droplet nuclei. These are extremely hard to remove from the air. This means that nearly any kind of simple cloth mask is great for source control. The mask creates humidity, this humidity prevents virus-containing droplets from turning into droplet nuclei, and this allows the fabric of the mask to block the droplets. Wearing a mask protects others from possible infection by asymptomatic individuals who do not know that they are infected.

National Academy of Sciences 5/4/20 – The below flashes represent laser light scattered by respiratory droplets following speaking the phrase “Stay healthy” into a black box. Spikes in the top tracing are “stay healthy” spoken three times. Lower tracing shows the same words being spoken at the same volume through a cloth face covering.



^{iv} Increasing evidence for SARS-CoV-2 suggests the 6 ft WHO recommendation is likely not enough particularly under many indoor conditions where aerosols can remain airborne for hours, accumulate over time, and follow air flows over distances further than 6 ft. The distance from a smoker at which one smells cigarette smoke indicates the distance in those surroundings at which one could inhale infectious aerosols. This is more of an issue if masks are not worn.

^v From **CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report** issued May 15, 2020 regarding the Covid-19 outbreak after a choir rehearsal in Washington (the official scientific reporting from the CDC): “This outbreak of COVID-19 with a high secondary attack rate indicates that SARS-CoV-2 might be highly transmissible in certain settings, including group singing events.”

** ELCA Recommended Guidelines