

PREAMBLE TO

The Comprehensive Plan for Return to Onsite Worship & Programming

In mid-March 2020 it became clear that the United States and the world was facing a lethal pandemic, which was given the name COVID-19. In response, LCC suspended all onsite worship services and programming effective Monday, March 16. The church offices were closed to outside visitors. The LCC Day School campus was closed to students and faculty, and a plan for online instruction and learning was quickly put in place.

This Preamble describes LCC's immediate and present response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Objectives and Strategies of Phase 1 of the Comprehensive Plan for Return to Onsite Worship & Programming will follow this preamble. (Note: A separate plan for reopening of the school is being developed by the LCCDS Board).

IMMEDIATE & PRESENT RESPONSE

Brief description: Members and friends are encouraged to shelter at home. Physical and social distancing must be practiced. Worship services are live-streamed and recorded. Meetings are conducted by Zoom or similar online technologies.

PREAMBLE OBJECTIVE 1: To ensure a high degree of public health and safety for our members & friends during the stay-at-home mandates and/or recommendations.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 1

1. Encourage all vulnerable individuals to stay and shelter at home.
2. Close the church offices and discontinue onsite worship services, ministries, and programming.
3. Educate and encourage members & friends to follow the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations: wash hands regularly; avoid touching one's face; use hand sanitizer after touching frequently used surfaces; wear masks or face coverings; disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.
4. Practice physical distancing ("six-foot rule") in public places and minimize or eliminate non-essential travel.
5. Ensure that custodial staff are duly instructed and trained to regularly clean and disinfect common areas.

PREAMBLE OBJECTIVE 2: To provide meaningful and inspirational worship experiences for members and friends in their homes during the time of suspended onsite worship services.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 2

1. Implement live-streaming and recording of worship services, redirecting the worship liturgy and space towards the camera and home viewers.
2. Utilize the pastor, staff, and a minimum of audio-visual volunteers to plan, lead and produce the worship services.
3. Reflect and observe the various liturgical seasons and enhance the worship experience of home viewers by creating visual changes in the chancel settings and the slides that accompany the live streaming.
4. Invite the gifts and leadership of additional members in the services by incorporating pre-recorded sections of worship (musical, readings, etc.) or involve limited numbers of members in live appearances.

PREAMBLE OBJECTIVE 3: To support and provide for tele-meetings whenever possible for meetings of church committees and organizations.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 3

1. Develop an LCC Zoom account that can be coordinated by the office Administrative Assistant and made available to leaders of committees and ministry teams for conducting virtual meetings.
2. Encourage committees and ministry teams to resume the oversight and planning of church ministry and business through virtual meetings.
3. Provide education and direction on the LCC website and in the invitations sent for participation in virtual meetings.
4. Give appropriate notice of virtual meetings, following constitutional guidelines when applicable, to committee members and participants.

PREAMBLE OBJECTIVE 4: To encourage and develop means of connectivity for members and friends of LCC during the time of separation and isolation in response to COVID-19.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 4

1. Reinforce the connection of the Pastor with members of LCC by use of Pastor's Email Blasts and communications during live streaming of worship.
2. Initiate systems of phone-calling and communication by staff and volunteers to members especially those identified with special health issues (surgeries, illness, hospitalization).
3. Encourage the Care Callers Task Force and other volunteers to make regular, preferably weekly, phone calls to individuals or families who live alone or with special needs, keeping the Pastor advised through updates.
4. Strengthen communication and the sharing of ministry highlights, church updates and news, and parish concerns using the Friday email News Blasts.

The COMPREHENSIVE PLAN for RETURN to ONSITE WORSHIP & PROGRAMING

Lutheran Church of the Cross
St. Petersburg, FL

GOAL: To return to a full range of onsite worship services, ministries, and programs at LCC through incremental phases during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic while following guidelines provided by health and government agencies, and the ELCA churchwide and synodical offices.

The approach to reopening will not be a linear one. There may be times of gradual reopening as infections decrease, followed possibly by renewed restrictions should new waves of infections emerge. The path forward will not be a matter of following a timetable, but of faithfully discerning and safely responding to the signs of the times.

The following plan describes the objectives and strategies for initiating **Phase I** of a return to onsite worship and programming. These objectives and strategies will be adapted and expanded as LCC moves through the months and possibly years ahead of living with the presence of COVID-19. **Phase 2** of the Comprehensive Plan will be developed when there is a greater awareness of the potential ending of COVID-19 and the return to a new normalcy as a congregation in our worship experiences and ministry programming.

PHASE 1

Brief description: On-site gatherings and meetings will gradually resume observing the CDC recommended guidelines for appropriate physical distancing.

PHASE 1, OBJECTIVE 1: To ensure a high degree of public health and safety for all members and friends as they return to limited worship and programming at LCC.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 1

1. Maintain high expectation for the wearing of masks in worship gatherings, for the washing of hands & hand sanitizing, and for physical and social distancing of participants at onsite worship or programming events.
2. Stay abreast of developing and changing health protocols & resources from CDC and government agencies under the guidance of LCC's Health & Wellness Team.

3. Formulate a campus & facility re-opening plan that provides direction from the various parking lots to corresponding building entry doors to the appropriate entry door into the sanctuary or meeting space.
4. Post signage that directs the movement of participants through doors and hallways to the designated seating areas or meeting spaces while supporting physical distancing for participants in transit.
5. Educate and inform members regarding the comprehensive plan for returning to onsite worship & programming, communicating guidelines describing the various steps and expectations to make the re-opening of campus and facilities possible.
6. Invite interaction and sharing of mutual insights, learnings and plans with our Day School Board, staff, and faculty.
7. Create contingency plans to alter re-opening plans should there be a new wave of stay-at-home orders, or an individual outbreak or case of coronavirus by anyone who has attended onsite worship or programming event.
8. Remain diligent in seeking out re-opening information and resources from the ELCA, other church bodies, health authorities, government agencies, and other potentially helpful organizations.

PHASE 1, OBJECTIVE 2: To resume onsite worship experiences, when it is deemed safe to do so, by introducing two worship services at LCC on Sunday mornings and potentially other worship services during the week to allow for the greatest number of worshippers while maintaining appropriate physical distancing.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 2

1. Initially offer two Sunday morning worship services to encourage and provide for the greatest number of worshippers while continuing to live-stream the earlier service or possibly both services for the benefit of home viewers sheltering at home. By live streaming the early service it is then available by recording to home viewers any time following the service.
2. On Sunday, Aug. 9, 2020, commence having two worship services at the new times of 8:30 am and 10:30 am, providing an hour between services.
3. Provide for the exiting of worshippers from the earlier service, the disinfecting of the worship space, and the arrival of worshippers for the later service during the hour of 9:30 am to 10:30 am. As health restrictions shift, consider the offering of educational opportunities within this hour.
4. Encourage high risk and vulnerable individuals as defined by CDC to remain in the safety of their homes and to continue participating in worship through live streaming or the viewing of service recordings.
5. Use similar worship styles and formats for both services allowing for variations in participation by various members and musicians.

6. Expect and welcome families with small children in worship, especially in the absence of providing nursery service and the offering of children's church.
7. Communicate in advance how particular parking lots will be correlated with specific building entry doors and specific seating areas in the sanctuary. Signage will guide worshippers to appropriate pews.
8. Require the wearing of masks as recommended by CDC and health officials, and provide masks to those worshippers who do not bring their own masks.
9. Designate and clearly mark every third pew in each section as an "open" pew for seating and stagger these open pews across the various aisles to maintain physical distancing. As restrictions may be lifted, the possibility may arise to move to seating in every other pew.
10. Direct worshippers to sit only at either end of open pews, and not to sit within 6 feet of another individual or family seated on the same pew. The ends of the longer pews in the interior seating sections are reserved for families with more than three members.
11. Project all worship liturgy, scripture passages, hymns, and announcements on the overhead screens eliminating the need to handle books or paper products. Clear the pew racks of all books, paper products and pencils. As may be desired, take-home announcements or handouts may be available at doors as worshippers exit.
12. Share the peace with fellow worshippers by waving, smiling and generally acknowledging one another without movement from seating areas.
13. Receive the offerings in baskets placed at the sanctuary entrance doors for use by worshippers as they arrive or exit.
14. Discourage social mingling and gathering in the hallways, near exit doors and in the buildings by removing chairs from the hallways and eliminating the coffee café fellowship time until it is deemed safe to return to such socializing.
15. Develop guidelines and recruit & train ushers & greeters regarding the new and different responsibilities and precautions for serving in these roles in the era of the coronavirus pandemic.
16. Dismiss worshippers by smaller groups in an orderly fashion encouraging them to exit by the same doors used for entrance and not to linger in hallways or entry ways. Encourage worshippers to maintain social distancing if they choose to visit with one another in the parking lots.
17. Communicate that this worship schedule plan approved by Council is intended to continue through Dec. 31, 2020, with the understanding that the schedule will be reevaluated prior to that date to determine whether to continue or change the schedule entering the new calendar year. During this time, if deemed necessary by the Worship & Music Ministry Team and the Council, the worship schedule could be adjusted to better serve the needs of the congregation.

PHASE 1, OBJECTIVE 3: To offer the Sacrament of Holy Communion to as many members and friends of LCC as possible, considering the coronavirus restrictions, and as frequently as may be feasible.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 3

1. Designate the worship services on the first and third Sundays of each month as services to normally include Holy Communion.
2. Develop a communion plan for safely distributing the elements of bread and wine to those physically present at worship in the sanctuary or onsite in another area of the church campus.
3. Invite home worshippers, who are able and feel safe, to drive to the church immediately following the worship service to receive the distribution of communion at the portico area of the church while remaining in their cars. Such distribution would be available for at least one hour after the conclusion of the second worship service.
4. Recruit and train volunteer "Eucharistic Ministers" who would assist in carrying the bread & wine, consecrated at morning worship, to the "door-steps" of member homes on Sunday afternoon. A method will be needed for those who are home-bound to make such arrangements or appointments in advance.
5. Train communion servers, assistants and eucharistic ministers in safe and proper means for distributing the bread and wine to worshippers while minimizing or eliminating the direct touching of the elements and those receiving communion.
6. Provide support for private communion by pastor within homes, care facilities or hospitals as permitted by regulations and as is able to be done safely.

PHASE 1, OBJECTIVE 4: To create and establish plans for meaningful Christian educational opportunities for all ages with consideration given to interpersonal online courses and onsite possibilities while observing social distancing guidelines.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 4

1. Suggest that the Spiritual Formation MT appoint a task force to reimagine an educational plan for the faith development of LCC members and friends of all ages during the time of COVID-19.
2. Include on such task force members with teaching experience of various age levels and members who have experience in A/V and online technology and strategies.

3. Seek feedback from parents on their desires/concerns for Christian education for their children, from youth on their desires/interest, and from adult members on their preferences for adult study and education formats.
4. Consider various options for educational programs that utilize both distant learning and virtual options, as well as onsite gathering options. Be mindful of the potential for onsite learning opportunities during the time between worship services.
5. Implement the newly developed education plan as soon as feasible and workable, possibly complementing the return to onsite worship on August 9, or beginning as soon thereafter as deemed safe.
6. Invite members of the Communication Team, the Spiritual Formation MT, the Youth Education team and the Faith Sharing MT to provide input on ways of communicating the desired learning opportunities.

PHASE 1, OBJECTIVE 5: To provide for the return of onsite meetings of committees & ministry teams, Bible studies & educational classes, and small group activities maintaining health and distancing protocols.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 5

1. Gather in meeting spaces that permit appropriate social distancing of at least 6 feet and encourage the use of masks. Chairs should be spaced and positioned suitably in advance of the meeting.
2. Continue to provide options for committee members sheltering at home to participate in onsite meetings through tele-conferencing and/or live streaming.
3. Notify the church office at least two days in advance of a planned gathering to ensure that the appropriate space for the group size is available and reserved.
4. Consider the use of outside and open spaces like “the Point,” or patio area, parks, or gathering in the shade of trees.
5. Expect the chair or leader of the gathering to have a plan for the clean-up and disinfecting of the space before and after the activity.

PHASE 1, OBJECTIVE 6: To develop robust audio and visual production capabilities for the live streaming and recording of future worship services and other significant events held within the sanctuary and possibly other areas of church facilities.

STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVE 6

1. Task the Communications Team, Operational Support MT, Worship & Music MT, and the Faith Sharing MT to each assess from their various perspectives the potential use and requirements of an improved audio-visual system.

2. Request the Communications Team and Operational Support MT to inventory the present A/V equipment, assess its limitations, and evaluate needs.
3. Seek and contract with outside professional A/V consultant, possibly familiar with a church, to provide various upgrading options and cost estimates to the appropriate committees and Council.
4. Communicate to the congregation and invite conversation regarding the desire for improved technological and A/V capacities and how such an improved system would benefit the mission of the church.
5. If needed, charge the Stewardship MT with the responsibility to formulate a needs-based A/V improvement financial campaign to provide opportunity for support from interested families and individuals.
6. Evaluate the potential outcome and need of developing additional, part-time staff position(s) to oversee and conduct A/V productions at LCC.

PHASE 2

Brief description: Social & physical distancing restrictions within our society have been generally lifted and there is a resumption of activities and events not requiring physical distancing. However, good health protocols are still encouraged. At this Phase 2, vulnerable individuals are cleared to resume participation in church gatherings and activities.

PHASE 2, OBJECTIVE 1: To encourage the Staff, Council, and all ministry teams to continuously evaluate the steps, developments and progress through Phase 1 as described above. In light of appropriate progress, to anticipate and develop plans for the time when restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic are lifted.

PHASE 2, OBJECTIVE 2: To develop a Plan for Phase 2 that transitions the congregation from life and ministry under the restrictions of Phase 1 to an anticipated return to a new normalcy as a congregation in our worship experiences and ministry programming. This plan would encourage a continued awareness of the importance of health and wellness concerns.

PHASE 2, OBJECTIVE 3: To educate members and friends in the continued use of good and careful hygiene protocols recognizing the fact that there is always the possibility of a return of the coronavirus and renewal of restrictions.