

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Adapting to Protect and Love Our Neighbor

Ministry Plan during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Resetting Expectations: Flexibility and Phases

When we moved to online-only worship on March 22, many of us had hopes of this being a short disruption with a quick return to our life together. We now realize that this will be an ongoing process of discernment and our new normal will be defined by flexibility and adaptation. We will need to continually monitor the situation, follow the guidelines of our governing authorities, and follow the recommendations of healthcare professionals. For the next season (probably over the next year), we will face difficult decisions and challenges. At times, these choices may rest between competing values, but we must reject false binaries (such as opening up everything vs. saving lives), and recognize that our response must be thoughtfully measured, agile and adaptive. If we risk relaxing our restrictions too soon, we could cause subsequent waves of infection. As we move ahead, we may move back and forth between phases in response to the virus and official recommendations. Throughout this journey we must always be guided by the core Christian question: What is best for my neighbor?

In times of crisis, especially on a national or global scale, we must all come together for the sake of caring for our neighbor. Just as Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for us, we gladly make sacrifices for the well-being of our neighbors. We must all continue to do our part to contain the spread of this virus, ensure we do not lose crucial ground we have gained, and protect those most vulnerable to infection. This means that as we begin to see other essential aspects of business and public life open up, we may need to take a slower and more measured approach, continuing to sacrifice our desires for the sake of protecting and serving our neighbors. During this time, to refrain from gathering is to serve our neighbor. We serve the health of our neighbors by slowing the spread of infection, and we serve the economic and material needs of our neighbors by creating safe space for people to work.

We believe that the Church is absolutely essential for the salvation and well-being of the world, but the Church has never been constrained to a place. **We** are the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, the members of God's family living out our calling to love God and love our neighbors. Whether gathered in large groups or from the safety of our homes, **we** are Church together, now and always.

May the God of hope grant us wisdom, patience and grace as we navigate the waters ahead.
May God bless and guide our every decision.

May God watch over researchers and scientists, care providers and those who are ill.
May the God of life, accompany us each step of the journey.

In developing this document, we have consulted with public health experts, church leaders, and guidance developed by churches and judicatories around the United States. The plan seeks to follow the recommendations from the Federal Government, CDC, Missouri, and St. Louis County, following a three-phased pattern. We will provide regular updates and any changes to our status as we monitor the situation in St. Louis County.

Below are recommendations of how to phase into our church gathering together again which aligns with the phases of St. Louis County, Missouri, and Federal guidelines. The Good Shepherd COVID-19 Task Force will make recommendations to the Congregational Council, and the council will make final decisions about moving from one phase to another and approving any adapted ministry plans as needed.

OUR PHASES FOR ADAPTING

The Federal document [Guidelines for Opening up America Again](#) explains a phased reopening. Before proceeding to these phases, the following criteria should be met, in order to mitigate against resurgence and protect the most vulnerable.

Cases

- Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period
- Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)

Hospitals

- Treat all patients without crisis care
- Robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing

OUR CRITERIA

Good Shepherd will follow local orders from St. Louis County and the State of Missouri and base decisions on data from the [St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force](#) and [St. Louis County](#). Phase One may begin when:

- A minimum of 14 calendar days of a declining trend of the 7-day rolling average of COVID-19 hospital admissions.

The hospital admission number was chosen as re-opening criteria because the number or percent of lab confirmed cases is subject to bias as COVID-19 tests are not widely available. As tests become more available, we expect the number of lab confirmed cases will rise as a result of enhanced surveillance. If improved data becomes readily available, GSLC may change or adapt the definitions.

SAFER AT HOME/SHELTER IN PLACE

What GSLC will do during a Shelter in Place order:

- Worship will be online-only.
- Worship will be recorded in the sanctuary maintaining strict social distancing practices
- Life Rituals (weddings, funerals) will be postponed if possible. If necessary, attendance will be kept to 10 or less, including Pastors & staff. All individuals will wear masks and practice social distancing.
- Bible studies and small groups will be online only.
- Youth and Children's activities will be suspended.
- Staff will work remotely with the exception of essential tasks that require being at GSLC.

PHASE ONE

What GSLC will do in Phase one:

- Continue holding online worship services only.
- Recording in the sanctuary, while maintaining at least 6 ft of space between people – greater distance between those who are singing.
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals) attendance will be kept to 10 or less, including Pastors & staff. All individuals will wear masks and practice social distancing.
- Bible studies and small groups continue to meet online.

- Youth activities will be suspended.
- VBS will be at home only.
- Mission trips are canceled for this summer.
- Visits to senior facilities or hospitals should be prohibited.
- Any functions of 10 or more people should be avoided.
- Office functions will be done remotely whenever feasible. If functions require staff to be in the office, the following will be done.
- Social distancing of 6 feet or more.
- Regularly sanitize high touch surfaces, including phones, doorknobs, and work areas
- Postpone indoor contract work, when feasible (i.e. routine maintenance).
- Church council and leadership teams of less than 10 can consider meeting in person if necessary & when online meetings are not feasible. Individuals will wear masks and maintaining social distancing.
- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place. (See [CDC high risk information](#))
- Every effort will be made to maintain individual privacy. Do not discuss another person's underlying condition. When necessary to explain an absence, state "they or member of their family is at high risk".

Moving through the Phases may occur when an additional 14 days of criteria are met, (ie. 14, 28, and 42 days).

PHASE TWO

The shift from Phase One to Phase Two is based on a re-evaluation of the COVID-19 transmission using the established criteria.

What GSLC will do in Phase two:

- Continue holding online worship services only.
- Recording in the sanctuary, while maintaining at least 6 ft of space between people – greater distance between those who are singing.
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals), attendance will be kept to 10 or less, including Pastors & staff. All individuals will wear masks and practice social distancing.
- Bible studies and small groups continue to meet online.
- Youth activities will be suspended.
- Visits to senior facilities or hospitals should be prohibited.
- Any functions of 10 or more people should be avoided.
- Staff will continue to work remotely as much as possible. If functions require staff to be in the office social distancing will be maintained.
- Church council and leadership teams of less than 10 may consider meeting in person while wearing masks and maintaining social distancing, but continued meeting online is preferable.
- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should continue to shelter in place.
- Every effort will be made to maintain individual privacy. Do not discuss another person's underlying condition. When necessary to explain an absence, state "they or member of their family is at high risk".
- The nursery will be closed.

Phase Three

The shift from Phase Two to Phase Three is based on a re-evaluation of the COVID-19 transmission using the established criteria. If there is a resurgence of the virus after we have moved to Phase Three the Task Force and Council will evaluate and may make a decision on the necessity of reverting to Phase 2. (See [Central States Synod Health Plan](#))

What GSLC will do in Phase Three:

- In-person Worship will be limited to 25% capacity allowing for social distancing. Masks must be worn. Adjustments will be made to worship services as needed.
- Worshipers will be required to sign up in advance of worship to reserve attendance and keep accurate records of attendees in case of the need for contact tracing. (Information on how to Sign up for in-person Worship will be made available before Phase Three.)
- Worshipers will wear masks. (Exceptions can be made for those who cannot.) See [CDC Masking Recommendations](#).
- No congregating in the Narthex.
- Worship will be recorded and continue to be available online.
- Life rituals (weddings, funerals), attendance will be kept to 25% capacity, including Pastors & staff. All individuals will wear masks and practice social distancing.
- Bible studies and small groups may meet with 6 feet of social distancing and masks. Coordination with the Church Office is recommended as many of GSLC rooms may not allow for 6 feet of social distancing between every member of the small group.
- Youth activities may meet with 6 feet of social distancing and masks.
- Visits to Senior facilities or hospitals will be considered if COVID-19 transmission within the facility is low and if allowed by the St. Louis County Department of Health and the facility.
- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff or volunteers, should consider continued sheltering in place until a vaccine is developed or Herd Immunity is proclaimed by the St. Louis County Department of Health or the CDC.
- Every effort will be made to maintain individual privacy. Do not discuss another person's underlying condition. When necessary to explain an absence, state "they or a member of their family is at high risk".
- The Nursery will remain closed.

ALL PHASES

- Signs are posted indicating symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Clean the building regularly and between user groups. Extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
- If we become aware of someone in the church or a building user infected with COVID-19, we will reach out to St. Louis County Health Department and cooperate fully with contact tracers. We may need to revert to an earlier Phase for a period of time until it is determined to be safe to gather in person at Good Shepherd again.
- High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), whether staff, volunteers, or program participants, are encouraged to shelter in place.
- All items in the pews have been eliminated except for hand sanitizer.
- Modify the methods used to receive financial contributions and attendance cards. Encourage electronic giving. Consider a stationary collection box instead of shared collection baskets.
- There will be no physical contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging,)
- No donuts, coffee or other food or drink will be allowed.
- Wafers will be served with no-touch, by dropping into cupped hands.
- The pews and aisles will be marked with 6-foot spaces.