

Dear Friends in Christ,

Beginning May 27, 2020 there are new guidelines from the State of Minnesota concerning “Faith-based communities, places of worship, weddings, and funerals.”

Before hosting groups over 10 people, faith-based communities, places of worship, funeral homes and other venues that offer gathering spaces for weddings, funerals, and planned services such as worship, rituals, prayer meetings, Bible studies, **must develop and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan** that addresses the following components. The Plan must be evaluated, monitored, executed, and updated under the supervision of a **designated Plan Administrator** within your organization. The **plan must be posted** in a location that will allow for the Plan to be readily reviewed by all leadership, staff, and volunteers.

Occupancy for the space must not exceed 25% of total capacity, maximum of 250 people in a single self-contained space. Outdoor gatherings must not exceed 250 people. Congregants should be encouraged to exit directly after services and return to their cars or other mode of transportation. Consumption of food and beverages (potlucks) should not take place.

Congregational Leaders should read and review the “Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening: Faith-based communities, places of worship, weddings, and funerals Beginning May 27, 2020”

Congregations should:

#1 – **Appoint a Plan Administrator** – someone who will monitor how the local congregation carries out the protocols that the congregation puts together in the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan.

#2 – Each congregation needs to put together a **COVID-19 Preparedness Plan** for the congregation and have it posted in a readily accessible location.

#3 – Each congregation needs to **limit indoor worship services to 25% of capacity** and not exceed 250 people in an enclosed space. If your church can seat 200 people, that means you need to limit the worship service to 50 people. How will you determine how to manage that limit within your congregation – first come first served, online registration, by invitation?

#4 – Each congregation needs to determine how to **socially distance people in attendance**. The CDC recommends 6 feet distance or about 2 arm lengths apart. Members of the same household may be within those boundaries, but the household should be 6 feet from another person or household. You need to block off pews to maintain that distance and to limit capacity to 25%.

#5 – **Cleaning** before and after services with a disinfectant. Common surfaces need to be cleaned and the disinfectant should not be wiped dry according to the guidelines on the product you use. It needs time to be effective. Bathrooms need to be cleaned and it is recommended that you place a waste receptacle near the door so that people can use a paper towel to open the door as they leave and deposit it in the receptacle. Hymnals and Bibles should be removed from Pews as they are not easily cleaned. Use projection, printed worship folders or electronic format that can be used on individuals’ devices for worship service.

#6 – Congregations need to clearly **communicate** that vulnerable adults, people who have symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, etc. should remain home and continue to worship

online or whatever alternatives the congregation has provided. Communicate the congregation's expectations to wear a mask, to be distanced, the attendance size is limited, and to express the concern for the safety of all. It is highly recommended that everyone limits the time they are together.

#7 – **Orderly procession and recession.** To maintain distance, it is recommended that people be ushered to a seat, filling in furthest from the entrance and ushering them out closest to the exit to prevent people coming closer than 6 feet. Pastor should maintain 6 foot distance from people entering and exiting. Passing of the peace should be suspended during this time.

#8 – **Communion practice.** It is recommended to have a touchless communion practice. If that is not possible, it is recommended that it be hand to hand, not hand to mouth. Those who distribute the elements should sanitize hands before communion and if they come in contact with someone during distribution, they should sanitize their hands again before continuing. The wafers can be dropped into the hand of the communicant, the individual cups can be placed on the communion rail before each recipient. I have seen one pastor use tongs to distribute the host (I would have to practice that one) and I have seen communion trays set up with fewer glasses so recipients can easily take the glass from the tray without touching other glasses.

#9 – **Offerings** – recommend a receptacle for people to place their offerings in before or after the service. People can also mail in their offering or use electronic means to transfer money to the church for their offering.

#10 – **Singing.** The state of Minnesota recommends that congregations refrain from congregational singing during this time. The State recommends using recorded music or a Cantor that is distanced at least 12 feet from anyone.

These recommendations are kind of a summary of what the State of Minnesota has posted online. It is recommended that each congregation read through the guidelines and consider their specific setting and how they can implement worship services safely. It is up to each individual congregation to determine how they will proceed within their context, no congregation should be guilty into starting public worship or shamed if they decide to use other means to bring the Word of God to their people.

https://mn.gov/deed/assets/worship-guidance-ACC_tcm1045-433301.pdf

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>

<http://www.mnsdistrict.org/s/MFC-Guidelines-for-Reopening-Churches.pdf>

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html#comm>

In His Service,
Rev. Jeffrey A. Lee