

GOOD SAMARITAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

PLAN FOR VIRUS-SAFE WORSHIP

Version 2.0: Approved for Use on Sept. 17, 2020

GSLC COVID-19 Task Force:

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Introduction and Purpose

In December 2019, the world became aware of a new coronavirus that causes a respiratory disease now described as COVID-19. This disease is highly contagious and spreads easily between people via exhaled respiratory droplets. Most infected persons exhibit fever, cough, and shortness of breath - but some infected persons never exhibit symptoms, and a period of time exists in many infected people where they show no symptoms but are still capable of unwittingly spreading the virus. On average at the time of this writing, 1 in 22 persons who contract COVID-19 will die of the disease. No vaccine exists for COVID-19 and only limited treatment options are available.

Good Samaritan Lutheran Church (GSLC) was required to end in-person worship due to the COVID-19 state of emergency in Maryland in March 2020. As the state of emergency was lifted, numerous new state and local regulations were put into place for public gatherings (including worship services). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the parent body to which GSLC belongs, also produced guidance for churches to consider when reopening. The pastor and council of Good Samaritan Lutheran Church authorized the GSLC Task Force to define a plan to resume regular in-person worship, pursuant to applicable state regulation and ELCA guidance, while simultaneously enacting procedures to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission during worship.

Consideration of God's Word

We emphasize the importance of meeting in person because Christians find significant value in corporate worship, reflecting each Sunday in the tradition of regularly meeting for confession, forgiveness, praise, teaching, communion and fellowship. Jesus instructed His followers to gather in His name ("For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." [Matthew 18:20]). The Bible also instructs Christians to be faithful stewards of Creation [Genesis 1:28-30] and to take care of their neighbors - not just their fellow congregants or fellow Christians, but everyone, including the social outcast (the parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10:25-37]) - a lesson we memorialize in the name of our church. From these teachings, we take note that we must be careful that our actions do not cause harm to others - a teaching we put into practice by taking positive steps to prevent even inadvertent transmission of this disease, as far as it is in our power to do so. Finally, Jesus specifically instructed us ("Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's..." [Matthew 22:21]) to obey lawful orders from civic authority as part of our duty to our society. Therefore, it is proper that we should obey the instructions of national, state and local authorities as we worship.

Arranging the Service

Responsibility: Pastor and worship planning team

1. The ELCA recommends a 50-person participant maximum for indoor worship, and we will abide by that limit. Sufficient worship services will be scheduled each Sunday such that all predicted worshippers can attend, assuming a maximum of 50 worshippers per service. Predicted worshipper count can be determined initially by survey of the congregation, and subsequently by monitoring worship attendance and signup rates.
2. To allow for GSLC to abide by the 50-worshipper limit, worshippers will sign up in advance for a worship service via an online service with church office via phone as backup. Records will be kept for at least 30 days. Sign-ups for a given Sunday will be opened on the Monday prior.
3. Worship services will be designed to be not longer than 40 minutes, per ELCA guidelines. The service may include singing and speaking in unison. The task force recognizes that these activities increase risk, but statistically-based infection models demonstrate the increased risk due to singing is overwhelmingly reduced by proper mask usage.
4. Printed material (bulletins, hymnals, and the pew Bibles) will not be distributed or used. Worship materials will be shared on the sanctuary screens and made available digitally for handheld devices via PDF (generated via Canva).
5. Worship elements that involve touching congregants will not be included. The Sharing of the Peace will be acceptable within families OK but not encouraged between families. Communal, shared elements for communion will not be used. **The pastor may either ask congregants to bring wine/juice and bread to be blessed for the sacrament of communion, or provide individually-portioned elements for distribution.** Parents are encouraged to bring their own quiet activity materials for their children's engagement as activity bags will not be provided.
6. The pastor will have the authority to determine whether worship **and fellowship** will be held outdoors or indoors for each Sunday. Outdoor worship is preferred to indoor worship as the risk of COVID-19 transmission has been shown to be significantly lower outdoors due to the constant air circulation, the sanitizing effects of sunlight, and other factors. The pastor will announce the type of worship service no less than 3 days prior to worship to allow for facility setup and communication (via email and website, at a minimum) to the congregation.

Facility Setup for Worship

Responsibility: Facilities Manager

General

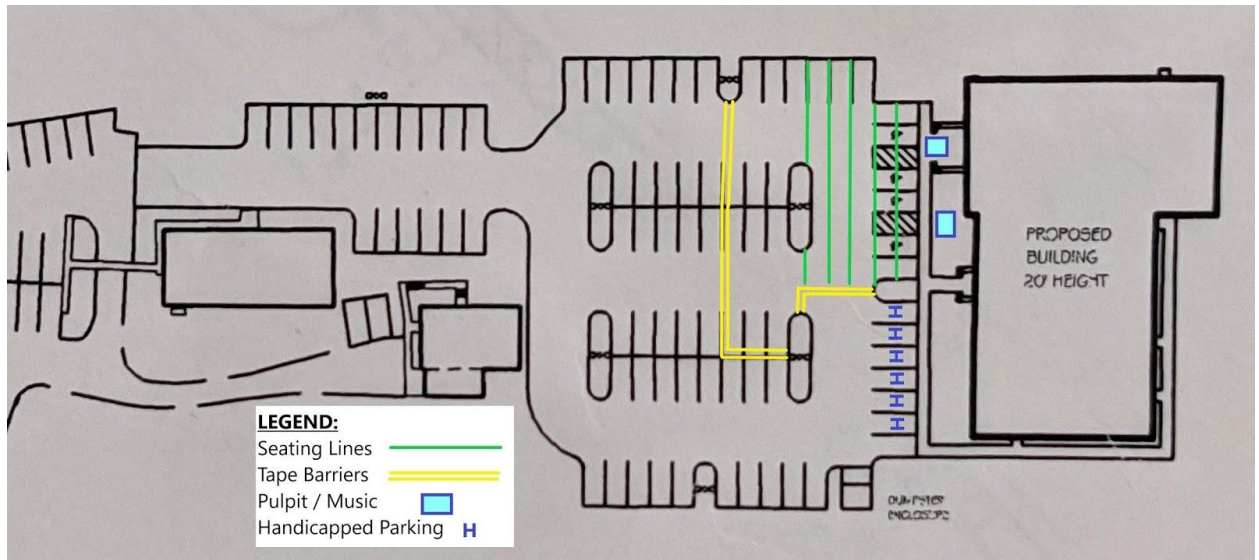
1. Signs will be generated and posted at entrances that will describe required and recommended hygiene practices. Adequate supplies of alcohol-based hand sanitizer and extra disposable or cloth face masks will be available for distribution.
2. The pastor may decide to use a “drive-through” method to facilitate special greetings, farewells, and other activities where most/all worshippers may wish to interact with a single (group of) person(s).
3. Electronic offerings will be encouraged to the maximum extent. Physical offerings will be accepted at a single point aligned with the traffic flow for entrance and/or exit.
4. Only the specific parts of the church facilities required to support worship will be open. Classrooms, kitchen, and other rooms will not be open for worshipper use.
5. The nursery and cry room will not be available due to the inability to maintain physical distancing. Sunday School and after-service fellowship will not be offered.
6. Both restrooms in the hallway outside of the office will be available. Each restroom, regardless of the number of toilets available in the restroom, will be reserved for one user (or one family) at a time, and signs will be posted informing people of that requirement. (Diaper changing facilities will be provided in the women’s restroom.) Cleaning supplies will be available for users who wish to give items a wipe-down before use. GSLC Facilities Manager will have the responsibility to arrange for clean restrooms prior to each service.
7. Water fountains will not be available for use due to the inability to sanitize the surfaces after users and the close proximity involved in its use.
8. The Facilities Manager may coordinate with the congregation to form a Setup Team to assist in moving A/V equipment between the sanctuary and the parking lot in support of worship each Sunday morning.
9. Each worship service, inside or outside, is intended to be broadcast online via live-streaming for the benefit of worshippers who cannot or choose not to attend in person. Pastor will inform the congregation that the service is live-streamed at the beginning of the worship service.

Indoor Worship

1. At least one exterior entry door will be propped open during times of high entrance and exit traffic.
2. Ushers will seat each family, ensuring that selected seating is physically distanced from other worshippers. Ushers will also keep count of the seated worshipper count and ensure compliance with state regulations (maximum of 89 persons in the sanctuary for 50% allowed occupancy; **133 persons for 75% allowed occupancy**), and direct excess worshippers to alternative means of worshipping (overflow rooms, watching from outside or via live-stream, etc.).
3. Alternate pews will be used for seating to encourage physical distancing.
4. The sanctuary and other rooms used in worship will be disinfected after each use, using diluted bleach or equivalent CDC-recommended disinfecting agents. A minimum of 30 minutes will be reserved for between-service cleaning (assuming only the sanctuary was used for worship). Detailed instructions for cleaning teams can be found in the [following video](#).
5. All shared worship items - hymnals, bibles, kits for children, etc. - will be removed from the sanctuary.

Outdoor Worship

1. If church is held outdoors, we will meet in the parking lot area closest to the church. The diagram below illustrates how the parking lot will be arranged for worship.
2. Worshippers should bring their own lawn chairs, and a limited supply of folding chairs will be available for use as well.
3. Worshippers will be expected to maintain a 6-foot minimum separation between family groups.
4. The parking lot will be marked with stripes every 10 feet, parallel with the front of the church, to establish cues for physical distancing.



Parking lot diagram for outdoor worship.

Facility Setup for Fellowship

Responsibility: Facilities Manager

1. **Post-worship fellowship may occur indoors or outdoors, as directed by the pastor.**
2. **Seating must allow for minimum 6-foot physical distancing between family groups.**
3. **If desired by the fellowship team, a serving line can be established for outdoor fellowship. The facilities manager will arrange for a serving line with appropriate 6-foot physical distancing separation cues and hand sanitizing stations.**

Facility Setup for Other Activities

Responsibility: Facilities Manager and Activity Host

1. Any other users of GSLC facilities must review this section of the plan and agree to abide by its contents. The Facilities Manager will be responsible for informing the host of the plan, briefing the host on the content, and has the authority to deny usage of the space.
2. Signs will be generated and posted at entrances that will describe required and recommended hygiene practices. Activity host will be responsible for supplying hand sanitiser for their guests.

3. Only the specific parts of the church facilities required to support the activity will be open. The areas to be used will be coordinated with the Facilities Manager and are subject to the Facilities Manager's approval.
4. Both restrooms in the hallway outside of the office will be available. Each restroom, regardless of the number of toilets available in the restroom, will be reserved for one user (or one family) at a time, and signs will be posted informing people of that requirement. (Diaper changing facilities will be provided in the women's restroom.) Cleaning supplies will be available for users who wish to give items a wipe-down before use. GSLC Facilities Manager will have the responsibility to arrange for clean restrooms prior to each service.
6. Other users are expected to adhere to all appropriate state and local regulations regarding physical distancing, mask use, and other COVID-19 mitigation steps.
7. Spaces used by the outside users will be disinfected after each use, using diluted bleach or equivalent CDC-recommended disinfecting agents. A minimum of 30 minutes will be reserved for cleaning. Detailed instructions for cleaning teams can be found in the [following video](#).
8. Use of GSLC items must be coordinated with the GSLC Facilities Manager prior to the meeting.

Post-Worship Fellowship

Responsibility: Fellowship Team

1. The fellowship team will be responsible for arranging and serving food and drink for post-worship fellowship, and participating in clean-up and sanitization in coordination with the Facilities Manager.
2. Fellowship may occur indoors or outdoors. Outdoor fellowship may include food and drink in addition to conversation. Indoor fellowship may not include food and drink. Eating and drinking is not compatible with mask use, and COVID-19 transmission risk is significantly increased while indoors and while not wearing a mask.
3. Up to two persons from the Fellowship team may use the kitchen in support of post-worship fellowship.
4. Food and drink selection will either be pre-packaged or served cafeteria style, in accordance with health department guidelines. Self-served food and drink, including condiments, will not be offered.
5. The fellowship team will wear gloves while serving food and drink.
6. The fellowship team may clean (or direct cleaning) with the methods of their choice. All surfaces will be disinfected after cleaning, using diluted bleach or equivalent CDC-recommended disinfecting agents. Detailed instructions for cleaning teams can be found in the [following video](#). Dishes and serving items are considered to be disinfected after being washed in hot, soapy water.

Rules for Worshippers

Responsibility: All persons present at worship

1. We wish to include the most people possible in our worship services each Sunday and we value in-person gatherings as a body of Christ. However, in a spirit of humility and to protect our congregation, guests, and community, no one will attend an event at GSLC if any of the following are true for themselves or anyone in their household:
 - a. They have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and less than 2 weeks has passed since the cessation of symptoms.
 - b. They show any of the following symptoms associated with COVID-19 (and not explained by another reason): fever of 100.4 or greater, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, unusual weakness or fatigue, loss of taste or smell.
 - c. They have been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 (or a person under investigation for COVID-19 infection) and less than 2 weeks has passed since the most-recent contact.

These questions will be posted at every entrance to worship and upon sign up for worship (whether inside or outside). Worshippers are expected to leave immediately if any of the screening conditions are met.

Worshippers are expected to comply with local regulations, which may include restrictions based on recent travel (see <http://www.smchd.org/coronavirus/> for St. Mary's County health department regulations and <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/> for State of Maryland regulations).

2. An optional temperature screening may be offered. If a person submits to an optional temperature screening and a fever of 100.4 degrees or greater is indicated, that person will be asked to leave the worship service.
3. Worshippers over the age of 2 will wear an appropriate face covering (mask) that completely covers their nose and mouth while attending **indoor and outdoor activities (including worship and fellowship)** at GSLC. Masks may be removed briefly for communion, as needed for hydration, or when alone in a closed room.
4. Worshippers will maintain a 6-foot separation from worshippers outside of their family (or cohabiting group). Worshippers will refrain from physical contact with other worshippers outside of their family (or cohabiting group).
5. For worship in the sanctuary, worshippers will wait at a designated point to be assisted to seating by an usher, in order to effectively use the sanctuary space and to establish appropriate physical distancing. Worshippers will obey posted signs.
6. ~~"Fellowship Hour" and Sunday school will not take place. and worshippers must refrain from congregating indoors before or after the service.~~ All fellowship between persons not cohabitating should take place ~~outside and~~ no closer than 6 feet apart.
7. We hope that worshippers will willingly follow these guidelines in order to promote the safety of our congregation and our community. If these guidelines cannot be followed by a worshipper, we offer the option to worship remotely via the internet live-stream.

Revision and Update Plan

Responsibility: GSLC COVID-19 Task Force, GSLC Church Council

1. This plan may be revised as necessary by the task force (or by the GSLC church council). Revisions are expected as the COVID-19 situation is rapidly changing and our knowledge of the virus is incomplete. Changes to the plan or plan cancellation will be communicated to the congregation for comment a minimum of seven days prior to implementation.
2. The task force will continue to meet at regular intervals to ensure the plan continues to adhere to state and local regulations, ELCA guidance, and is appropriate to the level of COVID-19 spread in the local community. Specific aspects of our weekly worship that have been deferred to later consideration when the risk level diminishes include:
 - ~~Post-worship fellowship, including use of the fellowship hall and shared food and drink (to be coordinated with Edna Allen and Fellowship captains)~~
 - a. Infant/toddler care (nursery and cry room) during the worship service
 - b. In-person Sunday School (to be coordinated with the Sunday School superintendent)
 - c. In-person Adult Education
3. The plan may be cancelled by the task force or the church council when the COVID-19 risk to the congregation is deemed to have been sufficiently abated.

REVISION LOG

Version	Released	Notes
1.0	7/24/2020	Initial release.
1.1	8/23/2020	Prohibitions on singing and unison speaking ("Arranging the Service", sect. 4; "Rules for Worshippers, prev. sect. 5) were removed.
2.0	9/17/2020	<p>Procedures for fellowship added (new sections "Facility Setup for Fellowship" and "Post-Worship Fellowship"; changed sections "Arranging the Worship", sect. 6; "Rules for Worshippers", sects. 3, 6; "Revision and Update Plan" sect. 2).</p> <p>Communion using pre-packaged elements added ("Arranging the Service", sect. 5).</p> <p>Updated allowable occupancy levels to include Maryland Phase 3 75% capacity limit ("Facility Setup for Worship: Indoor Worship", sect. 2).</p>