

# Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church

## Returning to In-person Worship

### General Information About This Document

- The congregation will receive a letter from the Council and Pastors when Stage A of Returning to In-Person Worship is recommended for implementation. This information will also be available on Messiah's church website, E-news, and Facebook page.
- Stage A will last a minimum of four weeks before any shift to Stage B. Every move from one stage to another must be approved as an act of the Council. Such a move can only be made by consensus of the Council. If COVID-19 conditions worsen and there is an increase in positive cases in Marquette County, there may be movement from a less restrictive stage to a more restrictive one. This will also be a decision of the Council.
- The Council reserves the right to change any part of this plan and its implementation. Reasons they might consider doing so may include: changes in conditions or changes in scientific information.
- All stage decisions will be made in adherence with any State of Michigan Executive Orders, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Pandemic Orders, or other jurisdictional mandates.
- This two-stage plan replaces phases 3 and 4 of the previous plan (May 21, 2020). Phases 1 and 2 remain in alignment with the original document.
- On May 2, 2021 our worship time will shift to 8:30 am. This is a 15 minute change from the current early service worship time (radio broadcast and streaming). It is anticipatory, so that when we return to in-person worship there will be adequate time for the sanctuary to be cleaned and ventilated in between the Sunday services.

## STAGE A of Returning to In-Person Worship

### When Can We Return to Church (physically)?

The approval of multiple vaccines and the growing distribution has given many of us hope that the COVID19 pandemic is loosening its hold, and we will soon be able to gather physically once again in significant numbers. We yearn for this day, yet we must temper our hope with the recognition that our timeline depends upon human-organized systems (vaccination distribution) and behavior (vaccination rates and continued protective choices to reduce disease transmission).

Together we can work toward making this day arrive more swiftly. We can continue to follow the latest public health guidance and receive the vaccine when we become eligible to do so.

Based on what we now know about the coronavirus and its transmission, **Stage A (our initial return to in-person worship) will begin when vaccination rates in Marquette County are 50-70+% (adults) and the viral transmission cases are 5-10/100K with the positive tests being <10%.** These rates have been chosen because they mark when we can expect a change in viral transmission and risk in our community. All of these benchmarks need to be met in order for us to consider in-person worship and large gatherings.

Stage A is also contingent upon Council's approval of building ventilation and cleaning plans and can only occur once the entire worship leadership team, pastors, live-stream technicians, nursery staff and musicians have had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated.

## **How Shall We Return?**

### A.) Worship:

- When we resume offering in-person worship services, online and radio options will continue to be available.
- Worship will look different in the following ways:
  - Physical distancing and the wearing of masks is mandatory for adults.
  - Communion will resume and distribution will be through individual cups, which may be received at the altar and consumed when one returns to their pew.
  - No-touch alternatives will be used for passing of the peace, collecting offering and all greetings.
  - Congregational singing, choral singing and the use of wind instruments will not be practiced.
  - There will be no fellowship or coffee hour.
  - The nursery will be available. Children ages 2 and over are encouraged to wear masks as able.
  - Areas of the church where people tend to gather will be marked with social distancing indicators.
  - A sign-in or attendance list may be required to be used in the event that contact tracing needs to occur.
  - During the summer months more opportunities for outdoor worship will be available.
  - Funerals and weddings may be held at the discretion of the pastors with all the same regulations as worship.

### B.) Pastoral Care:

- Pastoral care in-person will resume when the pastors have been fully vaccinated.
- When hospitals and care facilities are open to visitors, pastors will provide pastoral care in person.
- Congregation members offering communion or pastoral care in homes should have the opportunity to be fully vaccinated.
- Pastoral care will not take place in-person to those who have been exposed to COVID or are experiencing any COVID symptoms.

### C.) Other Gatherings:

- Any gathering must maintain physical distancing, mask wearing and hand-washing.
- Eating together will not be permitted within the church building unless approved by the task-force.
- Singing will not be permitted.
- Church small groups, circles, committees, task forces, Bible studies, book studies, adult Christian Education and teams can resume meeting in-person.
  - Pastors and leaders will decide whether to maintain some online options for high-risk individuals and those who do not feel comfortable being in public. Staff will continue to help facilitate online meetings via Zoom when necessary.
- Outside groups may gather and must follow the church's Stage A protocols.
- Tenants may resume using facilities and must follow the church's Stage A protocols.

- Sunday School and any youth or children's programming may consider fully resuming. Leaders of these groups will be in conversation with pastors, staff, and council about how to safely gather and proceed.

#### D.) Office Operations:

- Visitors are required to wear masks and will remain behind the protective screen that is set up between them and the office staff. Office staff will continue to wear masks and social distance.
- Office hours may shift to Monday-Thursday 8:30-4:30, Friday 8:30-12:00, and Sunday 8:30-12:30.
- Staff may return to work in the office as they feel comfortable.

#### E.) Community Assistance Appointments

- High-risk volunteers will make personal decisions about participation.
- Appointments may continue to take place through phone calls.
- If volunteers return to in-person meetings, clients will maintain social distancing and the wearing of face masks.

#### F.) Volunteer

- All volunteer activities may resume. Volunteers will wear masks and maintain social distancing.

#### G.) General Building:

- Signs will continue to be posted indicating COVID-19 symptoms and urging people to stay home/seek medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Staff will maintain a good stock of masks, soap, handsanitizer and disposable paper towels for proper hand hygiene.
- Cleaning of the building will regularly happen, especially in-between groups and worship services, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces.
- If you become aware of someone who has been in the church building who tests positive for COVID-19, tell a pastor or staff member as soon as possible. If approached, please cooperate fully with contact tracers.
- All building bathrooms will be open and regularly cleaned and sanitized.

## **STAGE B For Returning to In-Person Worship**

### **When Shall We Return (physically) Without Restrictions?**

**Stage B will begin when vaccination rates in Marquette County are 70-85+% (adults) and the viral transmission cases are <1/100K with the Positive Tests being <5%. All three of these criteria must be met.** These rates have been chosen because they mark when we can expect 'herd immunity' and a dramatic reduction in risk in our community.

## **How Shall We Return?**

### A.) Worship

- In-person worship will occur without mask wearing or physical distancing. Radio will continue for the 8:30 a.m. service. 8:30 a.m. and/or 10:30 a.m services will continue to be streamed on Facebook and Vimeo.
- Congregational and choral singing will resume as well as the use of wind instruments.
- Fellowship and coffee hour will resume.
- Communion will be offered by intinction and/or common cup.
- Other worship practices, ie. shaking of hands, passing of the peace and offering plate, will resume.
- Funerals and weddings will be offered as normal.

### B.) Gatherings

- All church and outside gatherings resume as normal
  - Mask wearing and physical distancing are not required.
  - Eating together will be permitted
  - Singing together will be permitted.
- Community meals may resume

### C.) Church Office

- Mask wearing and physical distancing are not required for staff or those entering the office.
- All staff return to working in the office.

### D.) Community Assistance

- Appointments resume as normal.

## **References Used:**

“Holding Our Plans Loosely: Returning to Church 2.0,” Wisconsin Council of Churches, <https://www.wichurches.org/2021/01/14/returning-to-church/>

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America resources, <https://elca.org/publichealth>

“Considerations for Communities of Faith” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

Guidance from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), <https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>

Guidance from our Insurance Provider, Church Mutual, <https://coronavirus.churchmutual.com/>

COVID-19 Resources, Marquette County Health Department, [https://www.co.marquette.mi.us/departments/health\\_department/covid19\\_information\\_and\\_resources.php](https://www.co.marquette.mi.us/departments/health_department/covid19_information_and_resources.php)

State of Michigan Coronavirus Resources, <https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus>

Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>