

The Resumption of Public Worship Services: It's Going to be Different!

With our Governor having moved Virginia into Phase 3, the resumption of public worship services in First English Lutheran Church will begin on July 19! After 4 months of being unable to gather in our church building for worship, we know many of you are looking forward to this! But some words of necessary caution and needed cooperation are in order. The coronavirus has not disappeared, and is still an infectious danger to the populace. Realizing that many members may not yet feel comfortable worshipping with others in our building, *we will continue to offer the video-taped worship service* that we have been sending to members over the past months. It will be sent to members via email on Sunday mornings, and will be available on our website at <https://www.felcrichmond.org/recent-worship-services.html> .

Our worship planning team, your interim pastor, and our council have spent quite some time considering how we might best worship together safely, and in accordance with state regulations and our broader church's recommendations. The following are practices and steps that will be required of all who come to the church for in-person worship:

- No one should come to our worship services if that person believes he/she has the coronavirus or has been exposed to it. Also, those who may be highly susceptible to the virus may well decide to postpone coming to worship until a safer time in the future.
- So that we would not have to undertake a complicated and involved cleaning process between services, we will be holding *one Sunday service at 10:30 AM* for the time being.
- With the exception of those needing to use the elevator, all congregants will enter and leave the building through the *front entrance*. Doors may be propped open, or manned by ushers, so that worshippers can avoid touching door handles.
- As much as the physical dimensions of our building permit, we must keep from one another *a social distance of 6 feet*. This will apply to conversations outside and inside the building, and to seating in the pews. Certain pews will not be available for worshippers; and available pews will be marked for seating in 6-foot increments. This means that our sanctuary seating is limited to about 50 spaces for individual worshippers or family groups.
- *Face masks must be worn* by congregants in the nave and in other parts of the building (unless a congregant has a medical condition that precludes the wearing of a face mask.) Because we'll all have to wear face masks, *the worship service will be shorter*: it will include the Prayer of the Day, one scripture reading, a sermon, prayers of intercession, and Communion. There will be no singing during the worship service. If worshippers wish to join in any spoken responses, they must be wearing a face mask that covers their mouth and nose.
- All congregants will *refrain from any physical contact with one another*. There will be no handshakes, hugs, etc.; and the Sharing of the Peace will not be included in our liturgy for the time being. Hand sanitizer will be available at various locations.
- Our *water fountains will not be available for use*, but restrooms will be available.
- *Offering plates will not be passed*, but will be stationed on tables, so that worshippers may deposit their offerings as they enter or leave the nave. *Worship bulletins will not be distributed*

by ushers, but will be placed in the pews before the service. *Hymnals will not be used* or needed, and should not be touched.

- *Holy Communion* will be served at the front of the center aisle. Communicants will come forward at the direction of the ushers and by sides. In the aisle, communicants will maintain the 6-foot social distance. The pastor will place the bread on a paper napkin on the serving table. The communion assistant will then place a glass of wine on the table. The communicant will be invited to the serving table, will briefly remove his/her mask to receive communion, and will afterwards dispose of the napkin and empty glass by dropping them into a receptacle. With face mask back in place, the communicant will return to his/her pew by a side aisle. The serving table will be sanitized before the next communicant is served.

Some may think that the above directions are unnecessarily complicated or cautious. But we have spent weeks in discussion of the state's regulations and our broader church's guidelines for safe gatherings. And out of love for one another and especially for the more vulnerable among us, these are the procedures we believe are important for us to follow at this point in the larger coronavirus pandemic. We welcome your input and ideas; but right now we also hope for the blessings of your patience, understanding, and support.

We have missed one another as the Body of Christ gathered "in the city for good." It is time to begin some gathering again – with appropriate precautions, but also for the worship of our God and the mission and ministry to which Christ calls us. I look forward to seeing some of you on July 19!

Pastor Chris Price