

We are Better Together
A Plan to Safely and Purposefully Join Together
Adopted: May 26, 2020 | Emanuel's Lutheran Church

The dates outlined in this plan regarding worship are expected to be flexible, based on the City of Seguin declaring that we, as a community, have experienced 28 days of declining COVID19 cases without resurgence. Office staff and ministry groups will return with a more specific timeline, as noted in the schedule of beginnings below. Keep in mind that **all at risk* demographics** are encouraged to refrain from any on-campus activities, worship services, or ministry groups.

Schedule of Beginnings:

Monday, June 1, 2020: Staff Return to the Church Office

- Staff will follow the workday guidelines established by the Executive Council

Wednesday, July 1, 2020: Small Group Ministries Resume

- Small groups will follow all CDC guidelines for physical distancing and each group's number will not exceed 15 gathered people

Sunday, August 2, 2020: Sunday and Wednesday Worship Resume

- One Sunday service and one Wednesday service, none of which will exceed 60 people

Expectations of the Congregation:

While the above dates bring relief in some ways, as there is now a targeted light at the end of the tunnel, it comes with a great hesitation, worry, and hope. With that being named, the following guidelines are being implemented as a safe and purposeful way to join back together. These guidelines will apply to all ministry groups, rental groups, building tenants, Bible study groups, and congregation members **until further notice** from the Church Council.

Worship Times: To attain a balance for our congregation members and visitors, it will be necessary to hold one worship service at 10:30am, with limited participation and including a different group of worshippers, each Sunday. Separating our congregation into manageable groups is not going to be easy, but we are using the following outline to manage these numbers. A survey, via email or phone call, will ask you two questions: 1) whether or not you intend to return to worship at this time and, 2) if you are returning to worship, which Sunday, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th, would you prefer. Once the survey window has been closed, reminder cards, emails, and phone calls will happen in preparation for our first Sunday/month of worship. It will be paramount that the service you sign-up for be the service you attend. We know this is not ideal and there will be times when your assigned service won't work for you or your family, but you are invited to continue worshipping with us online, via the radio, or at a later date through our website. All bulletins and worship materials will be made available online for each weekly service, including special services, as applicable. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Sanctuary Seating and Fellowship: Safe distances are key. Seating will take place every other pew, alternating side-to-side. Congregants will be seated 6 feet apart unless they live in the same home. Seating will be limited to no more than 3 individuals per pew, a group of four or less with one individual, two groups of two, or one group of five or more people. The chapel and choir transept seating will be chairs or spaces for wheelchairs set at 6-foot intervals. The nursery and "Pray Ground" will be closed for the foreseeable future to maintain approved physical distancing and cleanliness of areas used by our youngest worshippers. There will be no after worship coffee or snacks provided for the foreseeable future to aid in our ability to maintain safe physical distancing and hygiene of cups, plates, food, etc.

Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Choirs (Overall Music): Singing is one of the greatest blessings of our worshipping community, especially as we have been away from one another for so long. However, singing, per research provided by the National Association of Teachers of Singing, is one of the greatest ways to spread the virus. This will mean extreme changes must take place if we are to worship together again. The congregation will not sing until an appointed time when transmission of the virus is deemed nonexistent in our community. This will mean the use of soloist, duets, and other assorted vocal musicians will be necessary to lead worship for all hymns and liturgy. Worshippers will be encouraged to follow along with each hymn, selection of liturgy, etc., but we must refrain from singing. Our Handbell Choir, as well as guitarist, instrumentalists, and others who can help us diversify how we encounter the music of worship will be very important to this time of sharing in the worship leadership. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Communion: As a safety precaution for all of those involved, communion will be taken while seated in the pews. Worshippers will be invited to use the kneelers or to simply sit on the edge of their pew as the pastors and communion assistants share the elements. Following a recommended practice outline in the ELCA Recommended Communion Practices during this pandemic, we will adopt the following practice until it is deemed safe to partake of all elements of Communion: the chalice, lifted in remembrance of Christ's blood shed, will be offered with the words "the blood of Christ, shed for you," but for the safety of those communion, reverence of the element will be given but not shared. Meaning, we, as a worshipping community, will partake of the bread but not the wine. As Lutherans, we believe that Christ is fully present in, with, under, and through both the bread and the wine and the forgiveness of sins is not hindered nor degraded by taking only a single element. The pastors or communion assistants will pass down each unoccupied pew and place the wafer into the outstretched hands of each worshipper who wishes to commune. For those who choose to not receive communion, a blessing will be offered. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Ushers: Guiding people to their seats, making sure we are physically distancing, and aiding in the cleaning and preparing of the worship space for each service will be the vital work of each of our usher teams. Ushers need to be present for worship no less than 60 minutes prior to worship. This will allow ample time to prepare the sanctuary – which includes wiping down all pews and pew backs, layout the bulletins for those arriving to pick up on their own, and to make sure all doors are open as people begin to arrive and locked as service starts. The watchful and supportive eyes of these volunteers will be called upon even more at this time to make sure our house of worship is safe, open, and welcoming to all. Ushers will also be responsible for seating and releasing each pew, individually, to make sure physical distancing recommendations are always being followed. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Sunday School (Bible Studies): Faith Formation in the church is a vital part of our shared ministry together. Being responsible with how we gather will be paramount to the safety and health of our church. All groups who gather for Sunday School must follow the 6 feet apart guideline for physical distancing. There will be no sharing of materials, including Bibles, unless individuals live in the same home or are traveling together. All coffee and snacks are suspended for the foreseeable future. These guidelines follow the practices of "after worship fellowship." Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Ministry Groups (Quick Quilters, Ladies Aid, Property Stewards): Ministry groups will be invited to resume their activities, understanding that no group can meet with more than 15 attendees. Physical distancing of 6 feet between all participants must be followed for every meeting/gathering and any surface used, including, but not limited to, tables, counter tops, cooking utensils, etc., must be cleaned at the end of each meeting/gathering. If materials are being used, including but not limited to Bible, study materials, etc., there must be enough copies for each person or household to have without sharing. Please make sure to schedule any additional room needs or group needs in advance so that the Church Office can make sure we are staying safe as a gathering community. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Church Staff (Office Schedule): Our church staff will be following a new schedule that reduces the number of people in the office, on any given day, to three. Our “in office” days and hours will be Monday to Thursday 8am to 5pm. One of our pastors will be in the office every day to support and care for any pastoral care needs. Our staff will be working remotely when they are not present in the office and can be emailed, called, or texted at any time. It will be best to schedule a time to meet with staff if you have a specific need. Many of our staff care for and support family members who are in “at risk” demographics, as well as the ministries of our church though which we care for those most at risk. Limiting our contact with each other and with visitors, increasing our ability to effectively and safely serve our congregation and community. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Office Visitors: Our church office is certainly the heartbeat of our ministry during the week. As we slowly get things moving again, it will be vital for those visiting the office to not congregate in the lobby of the office. Our chairs will be reduced to provide space for two people to sit and wait. It will be the best use of your time and extremely helpful for our staff if appointments with staff are made prior to visiting. Some of our offices are small and might require the use of a different space for our conversations. Please remain the lobby until a staff member comes to you and welcomes you into their office. Masks must be worn while you are on the church campus and while you are around other ministry partners.

Day School Chapel: Chapel will commence as school starts for the fall semester of the 2020-2021 school year and will take place every Wednesday morning at 9am in the sanctuary.

**All ELC members who are at risk, per the CDC guidelines and definitions, meaning: those 65 years of age and older or those with chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, chronic heart disease, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, liver disease or weakened immune system, are asked to remain at home at this time.*