

The Congregational Council of Messiah Lutheran Church is pleased to announce that we will be returning to worship in the sanctuary on Sunday, July 4th!

Ever since the pandemic-related restrictions began, your council has been prayerful, deliberative, and careful. We've consulted the recommendations and rules provided by the CDC, the Governor's office, the Synod Office, and our insurance carrier. Much like the congregation as a whole, there are many different thoughts and feelings related to the pandemic, safeguarding measures, and safe returns among the council members. Our move back inside reflects the conversations and care of your council, and tries to continue to be prayerful, deliberative, and careful. More than anything, as always, we are trying to love our neighbors.

We hope that the following "Frequently Asked Questions" list will cover everything related to coming back in the building.

Q: Will the church service be like the way it used to be?

A: Mostly. We'll still be doing a few things differently, as you'll see below. For the first month or so, the service will still follow a pattern similar to what we've been doing in the parking lot.

Q: We will have to sit socially distanced in the sanctuary?

A: Yes and no. We recognize that some folks are ready to go back to normal completely, and others are still hesitant. Some folks have been vaccinated; others, like kids under 12 and those with medical reasons, can't be vaccinated yet. Our main goal is that everyone, no matter what, can feel welcome, comfortable, and safe. So, the "piano side" of the sanctuary will be socially distanced seating for those who aren't vaccinated or who just feel more comfortable that way. The "pulpit side" will not have those restrictions. We'll have ushers and signs to help direct you.

Q: Will I get to sit in "my" seat?

A: Maybe yes, maybe no; but the important thing is that we'll get to sit together in worship. Even if you're in a different pew, it's still not the parking lot. 😊

Q: Will you keep broadcasting on the FM transmitter and streaming worship online?

A: Yes, to both. We will have an area of the parking lot designated for those who still feel more comfortable staying in their cars for now, so that they can have the best reception. We will also continue to livestream our Sunday services on Facebook Live and post the video on YouTube later on. We'll do our best to greet and love you, wherever you are sitting for worship, at church or at home.

Q: Is All Souls coming back to the building, too?

A: Yes. For the summer they will be worshiping in the Fellowship Hall to give each congregation their own space. They've been meeting at 10:00 am during the pandemic. They will continue to meet at 10:00 in the Fellowship Hall for now. They will park along the side of the parking lot by the fellowship hall by the Atlee Road entrance; Messiah folks will park in the part by the office and sanctuary. We'll have signs in the parking lot to direct you.

Q: Will we be able to share the peace?

A: We will do "peace-in-place." If you want to share the peace, share it with those immediately around you. If you don't want to share the peace, just wave or give a peace sign or something like that. We'll respect however you are ready to share peace. But we'll try not to mix up all our air if we can help it for now.

Q: Will we pass the offering plates or bulletins or hymnals?

A: We'll have the offering plates by the doors for you to drop in your offerings either on your way in or out of worship. We won't be passing the plates. And we'll continue to have all-inclusive bulletins so you shouldn't need to grab a hymnal.

Q: Will there be a children's sermon?

A: Since kids under twelve are not eligible for vaccinations yet, we won't have them come up front during worship. But Pastor Ryan will prepare something for them each week that ties into the theme of the day that they can open during the sermon time. Just ask an usher for one on your way in. Also, check out the newly restocked busy bags hanging in the narthex!

Q: Will we get to sing?

A: We've learned over the last year that singing really broadcasts your breath and any germs riding along with it far and wide. The way we understand the CDC recommendations is that if you are vaccinated, you can sing. If you aren't vaccinated, for whatever reason, you shouldn't. We'll be on the honor system with this for folks to take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their neighbors if they aren't vaccinated. As a compromise, we'll start off our return to the building by singing hymns, but not liturgy yet.

Q: How will Communion work?

A: For now, we'll invite people to receive Communion processional style, which means you'll come up the center aisle and receive the bread and wine standing (as opposed to kneeling at the railing). We ask that family groups still maintain social distance when coming up the aisle, as you'll be walking through where other people have just been, and our air conditioning unit just doesn't cycle air that fast. Anyone who wishes to have Communion brought to their seat just needs to let the ushers know.

All Communion servers will use hand sanitizer before serving. The pastor will distribute the bread and wear gloves. The first lay assistant will have a pouring chalice, and you can pick up a cup on your way up. The second lay assistant will have the all-in-one grape-juice-and-wafer servings that we've been using in the parking lot. An usher will also bring Communion out to anyone in the parking lot.

Q: Will there be a greeter?

A: Yes – they will greet you, love you, and welcome you. They will be able to answer questions you might have or direct you to a council member to help. They will make sure to have guests sign the guestbook in case we need to do any contact tracing later on.

Q: Will we have to wear masks?

*A: As mentioned, the CDC says that if you are unvaccinated, you should still wear a mask and maintain social distancing, as well as refrain from singing and unison prayers. And of course, if you are sick – especially if you have COVID symptoms – STAY HOME! If you find out later that you have been exposed to COVID, please let the office/Pastor Ryan/a council member know right away so we can take the necessary steps. **"If you contract, please contact."** And, of course, you can also just wear a mask if you want to.*

Q: How will dismissal and fellowship/visiting time work?

A: We ask that you still keep some space between you as you exit the sanctuary. We'll also have the side doors open next to the socially distanced seating area to help prevent clumping up. We ask that all fellowship and visiting/social time be done outside in the parking lot.

One more time: we are excited to finally be coming back inside. We understand that some folks might feel impatient that it's taken this long and disappointed that it's not all the back to "normal" yet. We also understand that some folks still might feel like we're doing too much too soon and might not be ready to worship inside without a mask, or worship inside at all. We understand that some have been vaccinated, and that some haven't yet, whether because they can't or are choosing not to. And we know that there are still virus variants and other variables unfolding in the world. All of this makes things complicated for our return to worshipping in the sanctuary, but for a good reason – because we love each other. We love the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. We love the impatient and the hesitant. We love our brothers and sisters in Christ, our long-time members and our visitors, and every single neighbor. And because we love our neighbors and put them first, we want everyone to feel welcome, comfortable, and safe. And we can put up with some minor inconveniences and a few lingering precautions for now, because of that love. No matter what, we get to worship our God. And God is good!