

The Lutheran Church of the Resurrection

COVID-19 Statements

Updated September 6, 2020

Gatherings of Any Kind Pose a Risk

We recognize and we embrace this. We don't embrace this because we like it. We embrace this because it's a fact of life. We live in a fallen world and we are mortal human beings: **For you are dust, and to dust you shall return** (Genesis 3:19). It's a risk to step out the front door. It's a risk to get in the car. It's a risk (now, more than ever) to enter the grocery store. What each one of us must decide for ourselves and for our loved ones is, What level of risk is acceptable? Do I, or does someone I have close dealings with, have a medical condition that would put them more at risk? Is someone close to me elderly or extra fearful about this virus which might require me to be more cautioned in my actions? We must consider these questions, and many more, to answer the question, what level of risk is acceptable—and therefore, where should (or shouldn't) I go right now? Even if we and everyone around us takes every possible precaution, there is still a chance that we could contract the virus and pass it on to others. Despite all of the precautions that we take at LCR (which are outlined below), it is a risk to enter our church building. We need to recognize and take responsibility for this as we gather together.

Gathering for Worship Poses a Risk

With the nature of responsive liturgy and singing, gathering for worship poses a greater risk than gathering for other reasons, all else being equal. Scientists believe that SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes the disease known as COVID-19) is primarily passed from one person to another through small respiratory droplets which are exhaled when breathing (to a relatively small extent), when speaking (to a greater extent), and when singing or speaking loudly (to an even greater extent). The nature of Lutheran Worship, which involves all of these things, means that we are at risk of COVID-19 being transmitted when we gather for worship in a contained environment for 60-75 minutes at a time. Because of this, we have to make a decision about what level of risk is acceptable. As leaders of LCR, we have chosen a particular level of acceptable risk, which is neither the safest (staying at home) nor the least safe (returning to gathering as before with no precautions). Since this "level of risk" is difficult to articulate, please see our protocols, outlined below. Each individual must decide what he/she is comfortable with. If you are not comfortable with the "level of risk" we have chosen to operate within, we welcome you to stay home and join us online, or to schedule a private meeting with Pastor to talk or receive Holy Communion.

Gathering Together is Still Important

Even in a time of pandemic, gathering together is still important. The writer of Hebrews says: **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near** (Hebrew 10:23-25). This time of pandemic has taught us, though, that "gathering together" doesn't have to look the same way it always has. We encourage all members and friends of LCR to continue gathering together with other Christian brothers and sisters. Gather in person, with appropriate physical distancing and masking precautions, if you are comfortable. Gather online via FaceTime or Zoom. "Gather" on the phone or via email. We are stronger when we are together, and when we are together, we are able to encourage one another that **While the Lord is with us, the enemies will do nothing to us** (St. Athanasius).

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Limited Attendance

Per regulations by Governor Mills, attendance at any one church event will be **limited to 50 people** (if the event is held in the Sanctuary or Fellowship Hall), **or less** (for gatherings in smaller rooms). **Please RSVP for each Sunday morning service** to help facilitate this.

Screening

Like most other organizations and/or businesses, we have not instituted screening questions or temperature checks when entering the building. **We have discussed these interventions in detail and will implement if/when they become necessary.** If someone exhibits symptoms of an acute illness, greeters will instruct them to return home.

Hand Hygiene

Hand sanitizer will be provided in various locations (near bulletins & hymnals/shared books, in pews, and in classrooms). Any time you enter the building, **please sanitize your hands.**

Masks

Wearing a mask is required when you enter the building for any meeting or gathering (Sunday morning, or otherwise). If you do not have a mask, we have a free one for you. We ask that you **keep your mask on at all times** while you are in the building. We have added a sign in the sanctuary to remind everyone of this request.

Physical Distancing

Please maintain **physical distancing of at least 6 feet** from those who are not a part of your family/group whenever possible while you are in the building. This is especially important in smaller areas, like the church entrance and hallways. Please be sure to observe physical distancing while sitting in the sanctuary as well. Every other pew has been roped off to help facilitate this.

Cleaning

All commonly touched surfaces will be cleaned/disinfected after each use and between all Sunday morning services.

Ventilation

As the weather allows, all windows will be open in rooms used for gathering. For Sunday morning worship and other “larger” events, fans will be placed in multiple doorways to promote good air circulation and to ensure that any viruses or germs breathed out in the building do not remain in the air for long. We have explored ways to exchange or filter the air during the colder months but have not found a cost-effective and/or proven solution. Heat-recovery ventilation systems require major renovations and can only exchange small volumes of air with the outdoors. Commercial HEPA filtration systems can filter high volumes of air but are noisy and have unproven effectiveness against the novel coronavirus. **Therefore, there will be increased risk during the colder months due to the inability to ventilate the building as we currently are.**

Singing in Worship

Singing is an important aspect of Lutheran Worship. When we sing the liturgy or join together singing hymns, we join the company of saints across time and space praising our Triune God. However, we must also consider that there is some evidence to show that singing increases the risk of COVID-19 spread. Still, **there is currently no conclusive evidence demonstrating the risk of singing while wearing a mask.** Scientists believe that masks most likely attenuate the risk of COVID-19 spread while singing, **but there is likely increased risk.** Because of this, we require the wearing of masks for the duration of our service, especially while singing. This, combined with the level of ventilation we have achieved in the Sanctuary, has led us to accept the “level of risk” singing imposes, as we have outlined under our COVID-19 Statements. As the weather begins to turn and as fall and winter arrive, we will be taking measures to decrease congregational singing in order to diminish the increased risk caused by closing windows (and thus decreasing ventilation).

Pastor During Worship

Like everyone else, the pastor will take measures to protect himself and others from the spread of COVID-19. He will practice good hand hygiene, maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet, and wear a mask. The exception to this has been the sermon, where the pastor has removed his mask to preach. **Lutherans believe that in the sermon, God speaks to his people.** Therefore, it is extremely important that we remove as many barriers as possible from those who would hear God’s Word. Also, this process of removing the mask to preach is no different than the House of Representatives or the Senate follow, where the person speaking publicly at the microphone removes their mask in order to promote good communication. In addition, this maintains a sense of “normalcy” in the lives of parishioners, which is extremely important during a prolonged pandemic. Combined with the physical distancing of the congregation (more than 6 feet from the pulpit) and the high level of ventilation in the Sanctuary, this has promoted an acceptably low “level of risk”, as we have outlined under our COVID-19 Statements. **As the weather begins to turn and as fall and winter arrive, we will be taking measures to ensure that the pastor is less likely to unknowingly spread COVID-19.** Going forward, these measures will involve the pastor wearing a face shield while preaching (he will still wear a mask during the rest of the service) as long as we are able to keep the windows open. Once the weather forces us to close the windows, the pastor will wear a mask while preaching (and for the rest of the service) because of the decreased level of ventilation.

Entry

The door will be propped opened, so you do not have to touch it.

Use of Hymnals/Shared Books

Hymnals are used for Sunday morning worship. To avoid multiple uses, the hymnals will be on a cart near the bulletins. Please take a hymnal from the outward facing side of the cart as you enter for worship, and please return the hymnal to the cart after worship. A different set of hymnals will be used for the other service. **Hymnals will be “quarantined” for 72 hours after each use** (following the same protocol as the Waterville Public Library). Shared books/Bibles for classes will be used following this same procedure.

Offering

The offering plate will not be passed during services. The plate will be available at the back of the church for your offerings prior to the service. See an usher or Pastor if you miss the offering plate.

Holy Communion

Holy Communion will be celebrated during our Sunday morning gatherings, with some added precautions. Pastors and worship assistants will disinfect their hands prior to distributing the elements and will wear masks at all times during the distribution. People will be ushered to the altar rail by family unit, and appropriate physical distancing should be maintained while at the railing. If you are uncomfortable kneeling and touching the rail, you are welcome to stand and refrain from doing so. Parishioners receiving the Lord's Supper are required to keep their masks on other than while receiving the elements. **Please make sure your mask is secure prior to returning to your seat.**

Dismissal

After Sunday morning worship, ushers will dismiss each row by family unit. Please **wait in your pew to be dismissed**. Please **do not linger in the hallway or entryway**, if at all possible, as this will create congestion for others.

Fellowship

There will be no organized after-service fellowship activities until further notice. If you chose to socialize outside before or after the service, please take proper precautions, including wearing a mask and practicing physical distancing.

Tracking Attendance

Attendance is tracked at every service by the usher. Records of attendance will be kept indefinitely in case we need to utilize these records for Contact Tracing. This is another reason why **RSVPing for worship is so important**.

Church Library

The Church Library is still open for use with the following precautions. Please use hand sanitizer (located on the table immediately inside Room 201) before handling any books. **Please do not replace any books you handle on the shelf.** Return all handled books to the book return area (marked with a sign on the wall) next to the shelves—this applies to books you “check-out” and books you look at and do not check-out. These books will be “quarantined” for 72 hours prior to returning them to the shelf.

In the Event of a Positive COVID-19 Case in Our Congregation

In the event that a positive COVID-19 case is discovered in our congregation, the Pastor and Elders will work together with the Maine CDC to ensure appropriate measures are taken to prevent further spread. The congregation will be notified as soon as feasibly possible (at the latest, prior to the next Sunday) by an email stating that a positive case has been reported in our congregation as well as which service(s)/events the individual was present at. If possible, everyone who might have had close contact with this individual will be notified directly and more information will be given to them, as we are able to do so while respecting privacy.