

Initial Draft for Messiah Re-opening during the Covid-19 Pandemic

May 21, 2020

Initial Recommendations

Remember that “you are called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as opportunities for self-indulgence, but become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”

Galatians 5:13-14

Introduction

Based on written materials provided by the ELCA Churchwide Headquarters, various ELCA synods and congregations, Messiah’s insurance company (Church Mutual), and conversations among pastors, deacons, church staff members (including Messiah’s staff), and lay members of congregations, the following initial recommendations for re-opening are presented for discussion and consideration.

The recommendations are broken out into various categories of congregational life and operation. These recommendations focus on timing and policy, with more detailed procedures being developed once the overall framework is approved by the Messiah Church Council.

Mission

During this time of Covid-19 Pandemic, Messiah commits itself to continue to find new and creative ways to live out our Guiding Vision, Signature Verse, and Mission. We will continue to evolve our life and practices to **create** a culture of welcome, **develop** relationships with community partners, **provide** ways to live into God’s call for us, and **cultivate** opportunities to grow in faith.

Guidance

Messiah does not need to work alone as it responds to the Covid-19 Pandemic. In determining how and when to re-open Messiah both programmatically and operationally, Messiah will thoughtfully be guided by the following:

- Scripture and our own Lutheran Tradition
- CDC Recommendations
- WA Governor Jay Inslee’s Safe Start Washington Plans and Guidance
- King County Public Health Guidance and Resources
- ELCA Churchwide and Synodical Instruction and Guidance
- Church Mutual Instruction and Guidance
- Continuing Conversation among Church Leaders and Members

Communication

Messiah Lutheran will communicate with its members, friends, and neighbors evolving policies, procedures, and guidelines on at least a weekly basis. This communication will take place through the following means:

- Physical posting of necessary information to enter the building on all entryways.
- Overall guidelines for programs and operations posted on Messiah’s website and social media

- Articles describing and communicating current guidelines and practices via Constant Contact
- Video chats describing and updating current Messiah guidelines and practices
- Written material mailed to members without internet access
- Announcements during worship service broadcasts

Building Use and Hours of Operation

As Washington State begins the re-opening process, Messiah must work to provide as clean and safe an environment within its building as possible. As more people will slowly be utilizing the building, stricter policies and procedures for building use will be required to maintain safety.

- At this time, Messiah's building remains closed, except for the times and situations mentioned below. No one should be in the building except as mentioned below.
- To ensure safety and cleanliness, all members with church keys are requested to turn them in through the mail slot on the north side of the building. Keys should be placed in an envelope with the key holder's name on it.
- Sunday and Thursday community meals volunteers, along with Wednesday Foodbank volunteers, may keep their keys to access the building during their community service activities.
- If phase II in Washington State begins on June 1, Messiah members and the general public may access the building on Tuesdays, from 1:00pm to 3:00pm, beginning June 16.
- Entry for activities, meetings and programs outside this time frame need to be approved and coordinated with a Messiah staff member. In general, we are not resuming in-building activities at this time.
- These policies and hours of use will continue to evolve. They are restrictive in nature to allow for the cleaning and required sanitation of utilized spaces in the building.

Requirements for Building Use and Presence

Once inside the building, these general policies and guidelines will be followed:

- Facemasks are required during hours the building is open to the general public.
- Use of hand sanitizer is required upon entrance to the building.
- Social distancing guidelines and practices must be observed at all times in the building.
- Everyone accessing the building must log-in and log-out and record what part of building they utilized.
- Church staff will accompany visitors during their movement through the building. Also, if requested, church staff can take items into, or retrieve from, different areas of the building.
- These policies and guidelines will continue to evolve. They are restrictive in nature to allow for the cleaning and required sanitation of utilized spaces in the building.

Office and Staff Hours

As we move through the phases of re-opening, Messiah's office hours and staff presence will slowly continue to increase. For the health and safety of Messiah Staff, they will begin to increase their presence in the building at higher levels approximately two-weeks after each new phase is announced by the governor.

- Beginning Tuesday, June 16, Messiah staff will be in the building from 8:30am to 4:30pm. They will continue to be in the building on each Tuesday going forward.
- The general public can utilize the building from 1:00pm to 3:00pm on these Tuesdays.
- Staff will be available for scheduled, in-person meetings, on Tuesdays in the building. Appropriate social distancing guidelines, along with the use of facemasks, will be required for these in-person meetings.

Worship

In-person worship is the most complicated aspect of congregational life to implement during a time of pandemic. Thoughtful planning is a must. There are special safety and cleanliness concerns to be weighed, as worship is by nature a communal activity involving a closed space, talking, singing, ritual movement and a high degree of physical interaction.

Weighing the desire for in-person worship with safety, hospitality to those more vulnerable to Covid-19, and evolving worship routines and liturgical practices, the following are the current recommendations:

- No in-person worship open to the general public is planned at this time.
- Messiah will continue to monitor the evolving situation and make plans for a gradual re-opening of in-person worship.
- Messiah worship leaders will continue to provide online worship on Sunday mornings.
- Worship leaders will follow the stated practices above for being present in the building.

Fellowship

Humans are social creatures, and the desire to physically be present for one another is an essential part of our lives. The following fellowship events are currently under consideration:

- In June, a Zoom fellowship for conversation about Messiah's life and practices will be held. It will end with a time for prayer requests and a brief scriptural reflection.
- In July, Messiah will host one, in-person, time of fellowship, conversation, and prayer. This will be hosted following all governmental guidelines in force at that time.
- In August, Messiah will host an in-person celebration for Traci Vatne's retirement. This celebration will be held in accordance with guidelines in force at that time.

Faith Formation Programs

- Both mission trips, one to Alaska and one to the Spokane/Coeur d Alene area, have been cancelled.
- Trips to Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp, for both Family Camp and Kid Camp, will likely be cancelled.
- Savannah and Traci are putting together a summer schedule for fellowship and mission events, along with VBS, which will take place either online or in small groups as the situation warrants.
- The Senior banquet is postponed. Senior Sunday is on June 28. It will involve a modified worship to be broadcast online with Senior families present in the building.
- AOB Sunday will likely take place in July.
- Conversations are being had regarding the fall scheduling of Sunday School, AOB, Adult Education, and various youth events. Planning is underway for situations "A", "B", and "C".

Situation “A” is totally online. Situation “B” is totally in person. Situation “C” is a combination of online and in-person.

Service in the Community

Messiah continues to work with other community agencies to address the needs of the vulnerable in our midst. This is part of our DNA as a congregation and is clearly expressed through our community meals and Wednesday Food Bank.

- Our community meals and Wednesday Foodbank will continue to operate as currently scheduled.
- Volunteers for these programs will need to follow the above guidelines for being in the building including the log-in / log-out practice.

Future Directions

Considerations as the governor announces new phases for Washington’s re-opening are as follows:

- We will continue to take a conservative approach to re-opening. As we move into each phase, we will observe for two weeks how the situation in that phase evolves and plan accordingly.
- Worship in-person will begin again slowly. Online worship will continue. Holy Communion will be part of our weekly online worship beginning on June 14.
- Fall community life will be planned with both in-person and online options.
- This document is meant to evolve as guidelines from authorities, our community situation, and church conversation evolve. It will become more detailed as specific practices for being inside the building are practiced and refined. It is meant to be a starting point for our life together over these next months and possibly years.