

# Preparing for New Ways of Being St. Luke's Church in a COVID-19 World

May 27, 2020

## Overview

The vestry and clergy of St. Luke's are charged by our Episcopal diocese with careful movement through these four seasons of life through the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed over 100,000 lives in the United States—

- **Season One: Our current reality**
- **Season Two: Continued mitigation and slow lifting of restrictions**
- **Season Three: Lifting of physical distancing with protection**
- **Season Four: Application of learnings and future preparations**

These seasons, outlined by Bp. Rehberg, intentionally do not coincide with varying state or local plans for economic re-entries. We are currently entering Season Two, and are beginning steps of re-entry.

Our discernment as a church is always first and foremost with concern for others' wellbeing and safety, as our baseline. We will not put people at unnecessary risk in the process of offering opportunities for in-person gathering of our community for prayer, worship, celebration, fellowship, and service.

We have determined a set of principles, guidelines, and plans for steps to begin to renew in-person gathering and building use. This includes building preparation and continued disinfecting practices, re-opening for in-person worship and gatherings, and re-opening to external groups.

Dear people, please remember that we have three primary concerns for all we do going forward:

- 1) **Health and safety**
- 2) **Warmth, welcome, and care**
- 3) **Spiritual nurture and strengthening**

These are our guiding principles for any plans for once again physically gathering. We aim toward **incremental re-opening in mid-June or early July** (with watchful eyes on trends of coronavirus infection). Beside opening gatherings at the church, your vestry and leaders are considering other ways to gather and to be present with each other (which you can see at the end of this document).

## Spiritual life in each household and each individual life, during this time

For all of us, our relationship with God and our life of prayer and connection with God is vitally important – especially as we continue on with cautious re-entry in this time of uncertainty. People's spiritual health, growth, and life of service is our first concern. So, as we turn our attention to building preparation and the setting of policies for re-gathering in public worship and meetings, we also seek to **strengthen people in their everyday spiritual life**. We hope you will help us think and dream together about how we can best support and strengthen each other in our Christian life and faith during this time.

- How can we help each other tune in more to God's presence, and to opportunities to serve, during a time of greater social distancing, and more alone time?
- What ways, online and in small gatherings, can we help strengthen each other in prayer, bible reading, quiet meditation, healthy rest, and care of body and soul?
- How can we best contribute to care, support, and advocacy for others here in north Idaho?

## Things to carry forward

From this unusual “Stay at Home” time, there have been good, enriching, and worthwhile things we want to carry forward. Our re-energized telephone tree with its “branch tenders” has been well received and will continue. Our more regular contacts via email, and our continued mailing of newsletters, have also been well received – and people who do not receive email are grateful for those who print and deliver texts. People are listening to and reading sermons. Openness in prayer has grown in our worship online. These are things we hope to continue, moving forward – including online participation in our in-person worship.

## Expectations, guidelines, and principles for when we begin to regather

- ❖ We take cautious steps forward about everything we do, to create as safe an environment as possible
- ❖ A spirit of warmth, welcome, and care must accompany all that we do

Every step forward in this new time needs everyone’s cooperation and active support. Going forward, there are some things that are going to be given realities for a while—

- ❖ **Keeping physical space and distance** is essential
  - Distance 6 ft apart
  - One direction of entry and exit – in through front doors, out through office area door
  - No handshakes, hugs, elbow-bumps – including at the Peace and before and after services
  - People in high-risk categories should consider waiting to attend group gatherings
  - Eucharistic and Pastoral Visiting must wait for now – use phone, Zoom, email and text to contact
  - Ushers and greeters will function differently (see below)
- ❖ **Self-monitoring of health and potential exposure** is essential – attenders are expected to—
  - Wash hands before and after attending
  - Wear a mask for any activity inside the church – this is a pledge of doing our best to care for others around you, to reduce any possible contagion each of us can spread from our own lungs
  - Regularly monitor temperature – a temperature reader will be available at the entry to the church yard
  - Do not come to the church if you have a cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pains, sore throat, any fever or elevated temperature, or any recent loss of taste or smell
  - We advise serious caution and thoughtful decision about attending, for any who are more vulnerable to infection – it is fine to attend services online
- ❖ **St. Luke’s will create and maintain a safe, healthy, and welcoming environment**
  - The buildings will be cleaned and disinfected before we begin any gatherings at St. Luke’s
  - Professional cleaning will include Friday afternoons or Saturdays, and will include disinfecting
  - **Leaders, ushers, greeters, and others will help with disinfecting between services:**
    - Disinfecting spray and wipe-down after services – pew wood, cushions, lecterns, mics, door handles
    - Disinfecting bathrooms between services and other events
    - Disinfecting all door handles for doors used
  - **Ushers and greeters—**
    - Welcome people warmly to the church, observing 6ft distance
    - Guide people to pick up their bulletins and then take them to rows where they may sit
    - Take the lead in cleaning/disinfecting between services and roping off unused pews for each service

- ❖ **Minimizing “air-share” and “touch-share”** (see notes and links below)
  - Our in-person worship services will be shorter, about 30-45 minutes total
  - To increase fresh airflow, doors and windows will be opened – AC will not be used, and fans will be placed to draw air up, through, and out
  - Masks for a while will be an expectation – bring your own, and we will offer disposable masks at the door
  - We will not sing together indoors
  - Seating and standing must be 6 feet apart at least, and more for singers
  - Full bulletins with entire service and readings will be printed for single use (no re-use)
  - A table or rack will provide bulletins, lectionaries, and announcement sheets, as well as masks and gloves
  - Offering plates will not be passed – an offering plate will be by the side exit from each church service
  - We will dispose of bulletins and other papers in recycling bins after every service, or take them with us
  - There will be no coffee hour for a while
  
- ❖ **Worship will be different**, as we continue to carefully evaluate when and how we can have communion
  - For now, Sunday worship will be Morning Prayer and Well/Jordan “Liturgy of Word and Prayer”
  - We will work toward a procedure that works for safe distribution of communion
  - There will be no congregational singing, and only music offered by 1-3 singers appropriately distanced from the congregation and each other (about 10 feet minimum)
  - There will be no processions, or at most a procession of the cross from the side
  - Limitations in attendance will begin with 35 or fewer at each worship service
    - ✦ Now, up to 6 may be at Sunday services to lead for Zoom/streaming worship
    - ✦ Starting mid-June or early July, public worship and gatherings may have no more than 35 per service
      - **8:00am** – 35 limit, 6ft distance within and between rows
      - **9:15am Well/Jordan** – 35 limit in parish hall, with spaces marked off for households
      - **10:30am** – 35 limit, in different pews than 8:00am
    - Online worship via Zoom will remain available, with a leader to manage camera and laptop
  
- ❖ **Parish hall uses and practices will be different**
  - ✦ For now, there will be no coffee hour on Sundays and no meals served at the church
  - ✦ When there is a possibility of having coffee hour again,
    - ✦ There may be no self-serving at coffee hour or any other gatherings – food and coffee can be provided from servers, with masks and food-service disposable gloves
    - ✦ There may be no more than 4 people in the kitchen, spaced appropriately, to prepare, serve, clean
    - ✦ Time limit for coffee hour needs to be held to about 40 minutes
  - ✦ Windows will be opened in the parish hall – to facilitate fresh air flow
  - ✦ Seating for any purpose will be reduced in parish hall area – to keep social distance spacing
  - ✦ All internal groups need to adhere to social distance, mask, and cleaning/disinfecting procedures in their meetings as outlined for worship
  
- ❖ **Outside groups will not use St. Luke’s until** we as a worshiping community have found consistent, safe routines for ourselves
  - **Family Promise** is the single exception for now – they may re-engage use of the downstairs as long as all social distance procedures, including masks and regular disinfecting, are followed
  - **Recovery groups** will not be able to re-enter St. Luke’s building use at this time
  - **Other external groups** will not be able to re-enter St. Luke’s building use at this time
  - **Groups** to re-enter must guarantee and sign for completion of required cleaning and disinfecting

These are the guidelines discussed and agreed by St. Luke's vestry, in the May vestry meeting. Your vestry is keeping a careful perspective in setting plans, and wants to make sure that we in the St. Luke's faith community set everything in proper motion as outlined above, for our re-entry into public in-person gatherings and worship. **The vestry and clergy are aiming for careful re-entry mid-June or early July**, once we have seen whether there are any possible spikes in infections in the region.

## **Ideas**

Since our faith community is bigger than the limit we have set for Sunday mornings, and since people are eager for a sense of communion with one another in table fellowship, we are discussing creative alternatives and additions as well for small gatherings. These are some creative ideas we are considering – and these would depend significantly on laypeople organizing for them to happen:

- ✠ **Smaller household gatherings** of 8-15 (still keeping physical distances and health precautions), for St. Luke's subgroups – no more than 4-5 households each, priest making monthly rotation
- ✠ **Saturday evening service** – lay-led and lay-organized (Evening Prayer)
- ✠ **Fourth service on Sunday** – one of the services each Sunday lay-led
- ✠ **A monthly online Agape meal** with prayers of blessing over wine/juice, bread, and other foods in every home, and with remembrance of Jesus' last supper with his disciples, prayer, song, and scripture
- ✠ **"Spiritual communion,"** like what is offered from the National Cathedral – an online Eucharist service where people do not receive but do share in the Eucharistic prayer and the celebration and consecration of Christ's presence in bread and wine
- ✠ **Branch tenders as Eucharistic visitors / distributors**, following safety procedures to bring consecrated bread and wine to each household on their calling lists
- ✠ **Worship in a parking lot or public park** – proper permissions secured and distances observed

We invite your creative thinking and ideas as well, keeping in mind our three primary concerns – healthy safety, warm welcome, and spiritual nurture and strengthening. We invite your creativity as we think in similar ways about Christian formation and education, service and outreach, and public witness.

We especially invite your help in setting our plans in motion! We need good teams to help with cleaning and disinfecting, greeting and ushering, printing materials, leading worship and song, and assisting with technology!

God be with us all as we seek to be a faithful, loving, and caring community in this time ahead.

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