Returning to In-Person Worship  
St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, IL

Please take time to read this important information.

On May 29, Illinois moved into Phase 3 of the “Restore Illinois” program to protect individuals from the spread of the Covid-19 virus. During this period, it is recommended that groups of no more than 10 people should gather. When meeting, these groups should be masked and demonstrate strict physical distancing.

Beginning in July, Illinois will move to Phase 4 of the program. In this phase, gatherings of up to 50 people are allowed, with the same mask and physical distancing restrictions observed as in Phase 3. **While churches were exempted from these recommendations, the leadership of St. Luke’s congregation has demonstrated an abundance of caution by continuing to follow the general Phase 3 recommendations and not doing in-person worship.**

As you may have seen in the news, large gatherings and unrestricted worship gatherings have been a source in the spread of the virus in many areas of the country. Much of what we do in worship presents serious challenges in the spread of this virus, including:

- singing and public recitations (e.g., praying the Lord’s Prayer)
- sharing the peace
- offering Holy Communion
- fellowship before and after worship
- using community items such as hymnals, bulletins, and offering plates

We have learned that the virus is primarily spread through respiratory droplets in the air. These aerosols are expelled when speaking and singing, which means that these normal activities are now potentially problematic, especially in a group setting. Good, consistent, refreshed air flow and limited exposure are extremely important in creating a safe environment. Experts tell us that “outdoor” worship experiences are safer than in-door worship because of these factors.

Because St. Luke’s is a public building, great care must be taken regarding the sanitizing of restrooms and other “high-touch” areas.

Although these and other concerns present challenges, we are working on a creative approach to offer in-person worship while making it as safe as possible for the most vulnerable among us. The leadership of St. Luke’s has spent much time researching the impact of in-person worship. Most recently we assembled a Covid-19 Taskforce of committed members who are working with staff and leadership to design safe, meaningful worship experiences. **Please understand that it will take many volunteers each week – not only the staff and this task force – to make this happen. We will be reaching out to people, but if you are interested in helping, please contact the church office.**

In light of all of these challenges, St. Luke’s will begin to offer in-person worship for the first time since March 15. As from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, our decision making has been guided by an abundance of caution and love for “the least among us.”
We now ask that each person affiliated with St. Luke’s accept and live into this Covenant of Care as a way of demonstrating this deep love and commitment to our entire community. We want St. Luke’s to be a safe place that does not contribute to the spread of Covid-19, and so we expect all who worship at St. Luke’s to keep this covenant of care:

St. Luke’s Community Covenant of Care

I make this covenant with all those at St. Luke’s with whom I worship and have fellowship:

- If I am not feeling well, running a fever over 100.4, or have common symptoms related to the Covid-19 virus, I will not attend worship until cleared by a physician.
- If I have knowingly been exposed to someone with the virus within the last 14 days, I will self-isolate from all church activities for at least 14 days.
- If I discover that I have been exposed to the virus within 14 days of attending worship, I will contact the church office immediately.
- In my daily life, if I am regularly in contact with potential carriers of this virus, I will be mindful of my role in protecting the St. Luke’s community from the virus when I am present.
- I will bring a mask from home and wear the mask when I am on church property and remain physically distant at all times.
- I will use hand-sanitizer or wash my hands when I enter the building. Touchless hand sanitizer stations will be available.
- If I enter the building, I will complete the contact tracing log. (This log will be used exclusively to contact people by the health department if a Covid-19 exposure should occur.)
- I will respect all physical distancing guidelines.
- I will refrain from seeking a handshake or embrace while on the St. Luke’s property.
- I will prayerfully consider my participation if I am in the high-risk category for this virus because of my age or pre-existing conditions.
- Knowing that I am entering into this Covenant for my safety as well as for those around me, if I am not able to abide by this Covenant, I understand that I may be asked to not participate at in-person worship.

In-person, Outdoor Worship Set to Begin on July 5 – 10:00 a.m.

On Sundays, beginning on July 5, at 10:00 a.m., St. Luke’s will offer in-person outdoor worship services (weather permitting). If there is a chance of rain, we will cancel outdoor worship for that Sunday. A weather decision will be made by 7:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. Please check your email before leaving for church. We will not move indoors. Online worship services will continue to be available each week for the foreseeable future. We will communicate with the congregation through email and our Facebook page.

We have an agreement with the Village of Park Ridge that we may block off Cedar Street from 9:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Worship will be led from the sanctuary entrance. People will be invited to sit on Cedar Street, the parkway, and the south parking lot. Parking will be available in the north parking lot and on the street. There will be no available handicapped parking on Cedar at this time; however, we will have parking hosts available at the
corner of Prospect and Cedar to persons with special needs to nearby seating if dropped off and we will identify 2-3 near parking spaces on Prospect that are first-come, first-serve.

In addition, based upon our Covenant of Care, we share the following information:

- Everyone must wear a mask during their time on the St. Luke’s property. Children aged 2 and under are exempt. Masks must be worn for the entire service except when you are consuming the communion elements. Worship leaders will be masked except when they are actively leading. They will observe strict physical distancing standards. A limited supply of one-time use masks will be available.
- We encourage people to bring folding chairs from home. A limited number of sanitized chairs will be available to be picked up and returned at the Atrium doors.
- A bulletin will be available through the website by Friday morning. People are encouraged to print copies at home or access the PDF through their phone or tablet. A limited number of printed bulletins will be available on site.
- Holy Communion will be offered for both in-person and online worship. You are encouraged to bring bread and wine or grape juice from home. There will be a small quantity of pre-packaged communion elements (wafer/wine, wafer/grape juice, gluten free wafer/grape juice) that you may pick up at a table near the Atrium doors when you arrive.
- A secure, monitored box will be available near the Atrium doors for people to leave their offering. People may also choose to continue to send their offering via mail or through online giving.
- Strict physical distancing standards will be in place during worship at St. Luke’s. Household groups who live together may sit together. There must be a 6-foot diameter around your household unit and the next person(s) or household unit.
- Before and after worship, strict physical distancing standards will be in place while on the St. Luke’s property.

As with early and late service worship in the sanctuary, our services will be planned with the same music, liturgy, and while leaders may be different, in-person worship and online worship will be mostly the same each week.

We will continue to monitor and evaluate in-person worship as state and local agencies assess the danger level of gatherings and possibly move to previous phase levels. If at any time leadership deems the risks outweigh the gain, we may temporarily step back from these actions. We will also continue to work toward worship in our sanctuary, using the same care and commitment that have led to these actions.

We look forward to being back together again safely! This new opportunity will have its challenges. We ask that you be patient with us as we begin simply and make adjustments to provide meaningful worship experiences for your life of faith!

We hope to see you soon!

Sincerely,

Pastor Johnson, Church Staff, Executive Council, Congregation Council, and the Covid-19 Taskforce