

Peace Lutheran Church Faribault Minnesota Plan for Gathering amid COVID-19

The last public gathering of Peace Lutheran Church took place on **March 18, 2020** for a lent mid-week service. Since that point only online services have been offered at Peace.

It is the plan to offer a modified public gathering for worship beginning on **June 7, 2020**. Below is the plans for reducing the risk of gathering as best we can.

First points of importance

1. Online worship opportunities will continue being produced by Peace Lutheran Church
 1. If you are part of what the medical professionals have categorized as “vulnerable” please heed the precautionary advice and wait until a later time to return to public worship.
 2. If you do not feel comfortable gathering around other people at this time please understand you are not required to worship in this context.
2. Safety is a myth if safety is understood as nothing bad will happen
 1. The word safe has been thrown around a lot with the understanding that if I do activities 1,2, and 3 I wont get the virus but if I do activities 4,5, and 6 I will/could get the virus. This is a false claim. There is never anything that is 100% safe in any area of life and it is always about percentages and risk assessment. Life is simply one giant repeated risk assessment.
 2. We will be doing everything to reduce the risk of transmission we cannot guarantee that you will not get sick if you come to church. By the way no one can make this promise.
3. I would ask that we be gracious with one another.

If there is a risk at all why open? This is one question that I have been wrestling with since the very beginning. On the flip side is the question if you trust God why close down? This is a question that has been weighing on me as well. I can justify both of those positions biblically with great fervor. Here is a shock to you I fall in the middle. I would contend that the middle is the more difficult position to be in. There is tension in all of this, but the current state of affairs in our cultural and political climate does not allow for tension rather it demands putting a stake in the ground at one end of the spectrum or the other and I will not do such a thing. Don't allow yourself to be forced to choose a side and defend everything that comes out of that side. The two sides of the spectrum in the church world right now are open up and remain closed.

On one side of the spectrum you have the importance of worshipping together. The third commandment says “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” From a Christian perspective viewed through the work of Jesus, this deals with hearing the word of God (and keeping it) along with receiving the the Lord’s Super which is the word of God joined together with bread and wine which then delivers to the receiver the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and the building up of their faith. Hearing and learning God’s word can be done in some sense through other forms of hearing such as internet, radio, and television but you have to meet together physically in some sense to receive the supper. **Hebrews 10:23-25**

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ 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. This verse also tells the people of God to meet together. **Acts 2:42** ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* This was a picture of worship in the early church and again you cannot break break without meeting together. If this were all that was to be considered then there is no reason we should ever close the doors on worshipping TOGETHER. Simply trust God and let the chips fall where they may seems to fall short of loving our neighbor.

There is another side and that is to strive to love our neighbor and not put them in harms way. The idea being if I am sick or get sick I run the risk of infecting others and even if this sickness is not a big deal for me it may be the end of someone else's life. Commandment wise we are dealing with the 5th commandment which is "thou shall not murder." From a human perspective stabbing someone to death and possibly infecting someone with a disease that could possibly kill them are not the same nor would I argue that they are. Yet part of the commandment to not kill is to strive to do nothing that that could harm my neighbor in any way. In Luther's Large Catechism which is part of our confessional documents, he writes this LC:I:189-190 "In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so. If you send a naked person away when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone who is suffering from hunger and do not feed her, you have let her starve. Likewise, if you see anyone who is condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you have means and ways to do so, you have killed him. It will be of no help for you to use the excuse that you did not assist their deaths by word or deed, for you have withheld your love from them and robbed them of the kindness by means of which their lives might have been saved."¹ The command of God is to love our neighbor as ourself. If all of this was presented as the only side we should not open our doors because there is risk for someone involved.

Neither of these two positions are able to be carried to their logical conclusion nor does anyone advocate for carrying the extremes to their logical conclusions. Every time you step out of your door you are putting someone else's life at risk. You risk other people's lives every time you drive a car you have just determined that risk is an acceptable risk because for you not to drive or leave your house would be detrimental to many other things including your own life and the lives of your family. If this virus was killing at even a 5% rate across the board very few people would be talking about going back to worship. On the flip side of loving your neighbor the current issue with mental health and suicide is alarming and is an issue that cannot be ignored. Words like essential have been used lately to score political points, but I do view what the church does when we gather together as essential for the spiritual lives of people and not for the same reasons as our political leaders. Things actually happen when we gather together to hear the word and receive the body and blood of Jesus. So it has been determined that it is worth the risk to provide a worship service not with a cavalier attitude but with caution understanding we are only 100% secure in the arms of our Savior Jesus Christ.

¹Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (p. 412). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Reopening Plan

June 7, 2020 at 8 and 10:30am will be the first opportunity for public worship.

- the times may be adjusted as we move forward but to begin with times will reflect our normal 2 service Sunday schedule.

All worship services will have limited seating available for them and will comply with the State of Minnesota's guideline of 25% of capacity. 62 people is what I would calculate this number at and that is on the low end of the spectrum. How we do things can be adjusted but I would like to start with more caution and move from there

1. Again please understand ***the worshiper is assuming the risk that is involved with the current health situation.***
2. Every third pew will be used for seating
3. One family/household unit per pew will be allowed
 1. Each unit will be required to sign up prior to the morning of worship
 2. This will only allow for 13 family units per service which means that attendance for each service could be as low as 13 people but will be capped at 60 no matter the number of family units.
 3. If extra services are needed I [Pastor Lane] will look at adding worship opportunities.²

Elders will not be parking cars

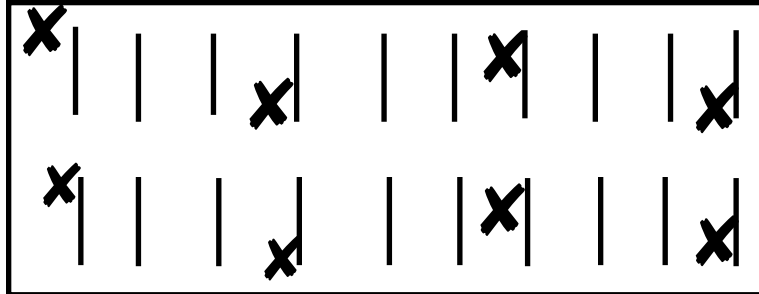
1. If you are unable to park and walk from the parking lot it may be wise not to attend worship at this time.

All internal and external doors that need to be used will be propped open

Entering the sanctuary

1. When you have a reserved pew and you arrive you will be asked to sit in the available pew that is closest to the front of the sanctuary.
 1. A system that indicates pews that are available for seating will be in place along with directions from the elders on duty for that day.
 2. If you need to be located in a specific spot due to needing the bathroom or other medical reasons it would be wise to wait to return to worship at a later date.
2. Seating will be spaced every third pew and alternating side aisle and middle aisle these will be opposite on the pulpit and lectern sides.
 1. See below an idea of what is trying to be explained

² I am willing to work harder in order to live in this tension of worshiping together while striving to reduce as much risk as is possible.



All pew material and pew pads have been removed

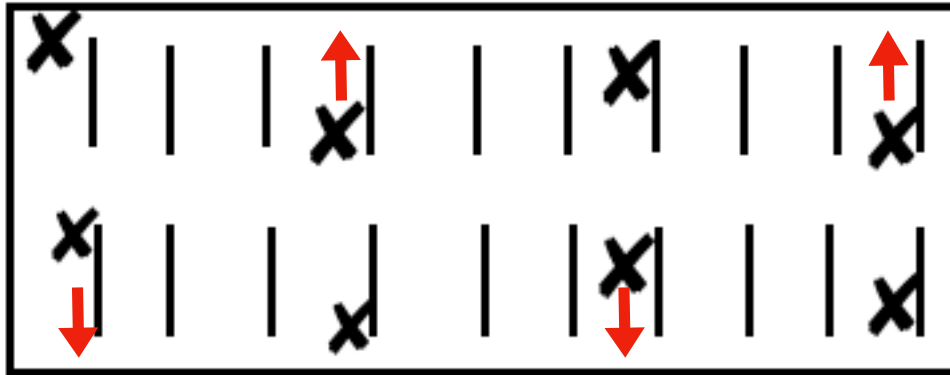
1. Services will be conducted through printed bulletins that will be taken home or disposed of after the service.
2. After the services the pews that people were sitting in will be wiped down with sanitation products

All services will offer the Lord's Supper

1. Distribution will be different as you will stay in your pews
2. The elements will be prepared on Saturday night with an individual cup and a wafer inside of a plastic cup the elements will be concerted and brought down the center aisle and placed into your pew. Pastor Lane will instruct the congregation to "take and eat" all at the same time then "take and drink" all at the same time.
 1. Please note this distribution method is not theologically ideal (though not commanded against) yet we will remain in tension of striving to do what we have been called to do while taking measures to reduce the risk for those who are here.



- At the time of distribution everyone will be asked to move to the side aisle side of your pew.



- A disposal receptacle will be in the pews to put all used communion distribution material

Bathrooms

- It is requested that you do everything in your power to not use the bathroom while you are at church.
 - If that is an issue due to medical reasons it is advised that you wait until a later time to return to worship.
- If you simply would like to wash your hands please use the sink in the gathering space and not the bathrooms as those are a much more enclosed space.
- Exterior bathroom doors will remain propped open **DO NOT CLOSE THEM**
 - Men use the stall if this makes you uncomfortable
- I am working on a way to indicate occupied vs vacant

Dismissal

- You will be ushered out of the sanctuary after the worship service is over starting from the back moving to the front.
- You will be asked to directly exit the building.
 - If you would like to talk to someone please do that outside and with the proper recommend social distancing steps in place.
- There will be no fellowship nor will there be any in person bible study or Sunday school.

Singing

- This is a hot topic in this conversation. I can give you medical studies that say singing increases the risk and singing poses no additional risk compared to talking when distanced properly.

1. We will have music and if you would like to sing please feel free but perhaps it would be wise to quietly sing rather than full singing. I have a sneaking suspicion for many this will mean no change to their normal singing. (Its ok to laugh a little)

Masks

1. I would ask that you wear a mask but I will not require it. There are masks available here at church. The state of MN guidelines does ask for people to wear masks.
2. I will not wear one while I lead the service, but will wear one when I distribute the elements.
3. The Elders will be asked to wear masks when they assist with directions and dismissal.

Drive-Up Communion

1. I understand there will be many people within our congregation who are a part of the vulnerable category and/or who do not feel it wise to return to in person worship at this time. Because of this reality I will still be providing monthly drive up communion in order for you to receive the sacrament while not attending in person worship.