



Hope Lutheran Church

5350 Providence Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23464



Date: 20 May 2020
From: Chad Kaiser, President, Hope Lutheran Church Council
To: Hope Lutheran Congregation
Subject: RESUMPTION OF WORSHIP SERVICES AT HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Hope Lutheran Congregation,

The purpose of this update is to provide information on our plan to resume worship services on a limited scale. The first page of the document provides a short summary of what to expect. Additional detail is provided on pages two through four. The situation remains fluid and we will continue to adjust our plans as needed. I ask for continued patience as we navigate this ever-changing situation.

Summary of what to expect:

- On Sunday, May 24th at 09:30, we will hold a single service in the fellowship hall.
- The capacity of the fellowship hall is approximately 420 people, which means we are limited to 210 persons.
- We are still working through the details but expect to go through a limited screening process as you enter the church.
- Face coverings are **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** and will be required for volunteer positions who will not be able to maintain the six-foot recommended social distance (check-in desk, ushers).
- The service will be modified to be “touchless.”
- Common use items such as hymnals and the church bibles will be removed to limit the number of items that must be cleaned / sanitized.
- The School wing will be closed and locked.
- There will be a bible study session held shortly after the service ends but no children’s Sunday school
- For at least the first week we will not hold tasty fellowship.
- Once we are done with bible study, we will need to wipe down all the surfaces around the fellowship hall, narthex, and bathrooms
- Despite our best efforts, we have not been able to obtain additional hand sanitizer.
- The online 09:30 service and the online bible studies will continue as they have been for the last 9 weeks.



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The staff, council and I spent a lot of time doing research, consulting current expert guidance, and praying about the best way to resume limited worship services at Hope. Before diving into the details of the plan we have developed, there are a few points that are worth stating.

- 1) We must remember our mission has not changed. We are dedicated to loving and obeying God, who works through us to save and change lives through Worshiping Him, Learning His Word, Serving others, and Seeking the lost. This is our #1 priority.
- 2) The health, safety and well-being of our church family and visitors is our next highest priority. We are and will continue to do everything we can to prioritize the health and safety of every person who walks through our doors, but that must be balanced with what is possible and practical. I want everyone to understand there is no perfect solution to the challenges we face. We are being forced to balance many different factors with many unknowns. At this point I am intentionally leaning to the side of caution because there are just too many unknowns. In the end if you have concerns, please address them to Pastor Whitfield and me alone. I also ask everyone to practice the same humble patience Jesus showed us.

The staff and council have worked extremely hard to come up with a plan that enables us to continue working towards God's mission while keeping all of our members and visitors safe and healthy. Here is how we intend to resume a limited service schedule:

- **On Sunday, May 24th at 09:30, we will hold a single service in the fellowship hall.** The fellowship hall is the largest space we have, which will accommodate proper social distancing. We also have the option of opening the outside doors to circulate fresh air. The service is based on Divine Setting 5 and will have a traditional feel.
- **The capacity of the fellowship hall is approximately 420 people, which means we are limited to 210 persons.** Our average combined in person attendance for both services before we paused in person services was about 270. We know there are many people who are not yet comfortable with the idea of attending in person services. Based on that I am confident attendance will remain within required constraints. We will space seating rows out at least 6 feet apart but chairs will be placed together as normal to allow for families who do not need to distance themselves to sit together. Each chair is almost 24" wide so at a minimum you should stay 3 chairs apart from other persons who are not in your family / normal contact group.
- **We are still working through the details but expect to go through a limited screening process as you enter the church.** At a minimum we need to ensure we have good contact information for everyone who attends just in case we need to support contact tracing. This may slow down entrance into the church building so please plan accordingly. Entry and exit from the church will be limited to the main church doors.



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- **Face coverings are STRONGLY RECOMMENDED and will be required for volunteer positions who will not be able to maintain the six-foot recommended social distance (check-in desk, ushers).** I understand that no matter what policy we put in place some of you will not agree. Here are some factors to consider:
 - In-person church services are considered a high-risk setting for COVID-19 due to the increased likelihood of airborne transmission. There are several notable examples of COVID-19 outbreaks resulting from in-person worship services.
 - Per the CDC, “SARS-CoV-2 might be highly transmissible in certain settings, including group singing events.”
 - A study non-related to COVID-19 found that even normal speech produced tiny airborne droplets that can linger in the air for between 8-14 minutes.
 - “CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.”
 - “CDC also advises the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.”

I have spent a lot of time researching this and getting different points of view. I am by no means an expert, but here are my big takeaways:

- 1) There is a significant amount of evidence the virus is capable of airborne transmission through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can linger in the air for several minutes and land on surfaces.
 - 2) The nature of worship services involves a great deal of speaking and singing by the congregation. This increases the number of respiratory droplets being emitted into the air that can potentially be inhaled by others in close proximity.
 - 3) Wearing face coverings reduces the number of respiratory droplets that escape into the air when speaking, coughing or sneezing. This clearly has the potential to reduce the likelihood of unknowingly spreading COVID-19 to others. The effectiveness is unknown, but it is clearly better than not wearing anything.
- **The service will be modified to be “touchless.”** We are still working through a few of the details but expect the following:
 - No handshakes or passing of the peace
 - No coffee station or tasty fellowship
 - No attendance pads
 - Tithes and offerings will be collected using no-touch stations
 - No childcare will be available



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- **Common use items such as hymnals and the church bibles will be removed to limit the number of items that must be cleaned / sanitized.** Everything required to worship will be provided either in the bulletin or on the screens in the fellowship hall. I encourage everyone to bring their own personal bibles and any other materials you would like to have for the service. We are finalizing a plan to allow our members to check-out hymnals that can be taken home and used in future worship services. I think that is a great idea that will make things a lot easier in the near future.
- **The School wing will be closed and locked.** Bev has worked extremely hard to maintain childcare operations, which requires we maintain a safe boundary between the church and school wings.
- **There will be a bible study session held shortly after the service ends but no children's Sunday school.** I understand many of you may not be able to participate given everything that is going on especially since we will not have childcare services available. However, we feel the Lord wants us to do our best to resume the study of His Word for those who can participate in this format.
- **For at least the first week we will not hold tasty fellowship.** We need to work through a few more details before we resume that tasty tradition.
- **Once we are done with bible study, we will need to wipe down all the surfaces around the fellowship hall, narthex, and bathrooms.** I would greatly appreciate your assistance if you are able to do so. I believe we have enough cleaning supplies to support this task so all we need are willing hearts and hands.
- **Despite our best efforts, we have not been able to obtain additional hand sanitizer.** As soon as the situation started, our property lead, Keith Frederick, began looking for additional hand sanitizer and dispensers. As you can imagine, they are not easy to find, and we have yet to obtain what we are looking for. If you desire hand sanitizer, please bring your own from home.
- **The online 09:30 service and the online bible studies will continue.**

We plan to take things slow and reevaluate our plan each week. We recognize many people may be hesitant to come to our church building to participate in a service. Please do not feel guilty or compelled to attend if you are not comfortable with doing so. To do so will only distract from worshiping God, which defeats the purpose of coming. In addition, if you have a fever, traveled outside the local area in the last 14 days or suspect you may have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days please stay home. Each of us doing these simple things is one of the easiest ways we can show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME! GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES!