

Protocols for Beginning Some Public Worship Services during COVID-19 Crisis.

May 20, 2020

Recognizing the spiritual impact that this crisis is having on the people of Minnesota and the resulting psychological consequences, we believe that some limited religious services should be allowed in houses of worship, provided that precautions are taken to ensure social distancing necessary to minimize the risk for the spread of the virus. These protocols have been developed based on current guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health authorities.

These essential worship services would include regular religious services and other celebrations (e.g., baptisms, weddings, and funerals). This would not include social gatherings or public events, though small group studies and support meetings, appropriately distanced, could be allowed. The following precautionary measures will be put in place:

- Chairs will be removed or pews will be roped off so that people cannot sit closer than 6 feet (unless they are members of the same household living together).
- The space will be thoroughly sanitized before and after each service, including all entryways and doors. Hand sanitizer will be available at all entryways.
- Doors will be propped open and one-way traffic patterns will be introduced to ensure social distancing. Ushers will assist when necessary to help maintain physical distancing.
- Signs will be posted concerning social distancing and sanitation requirements and reminders will be offered.
- Collection plates and other items will not be passed person to person.
- People will be encouraged to bring their own protective wear including facemasks.
- People will be instructed not to greet each other with touching.
- Choirs singing close together will not be allowed.
- Signs and other instructions will encourage normal safe practices necessary to stop the spread (e.g. cough or sneeze into a shirtsleeve, handkerchief, or tissue; avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs).
- Baptismal fonts will be empty and alternatives to hymnals, such as disposable paper worship aids will be provided when possible.
- Ventilation will be increased as much as possible, opening windows and doors, as weather permits.
- Facilities will develop a plan for restroom use to limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom maintaining 6-foot distance from each other.

We propose beginning with groups not to exceed 1/3 of the seating capacity of the worship space. We will offer more services if necessary and encourage people to come on other days of the week instead of Sunday, in order to spread them out. We will continue to remind people that no one is obliged to come if they do not feel safe and will live-stream for those who stay home. By using on-line sign up and other ways to spread out attendance, we will ensure that the number

of people who come does not exceed the agreed upon limit. Those over age 65 would be strongly encouraged not to attend, and we will continue to provide online services so that they can still participate. In addition, anyone showing any symptoms of sickness, or anyone who has a household member who is sick or showing symptoms of sickness should not attend; this includes pastors who are sick or showing signs of sickness. If leadership becomes aware of a clear, immediate, and imminent threat to the safety of the attendees or determines that the abovementioned protocols cannot be observed, the gathering will be cancelled until the protocols can be observed.

We invite civic officials to proactively engage our communities when they hear of gatherings that do not meet these standards. And we always welcome the opportunity to show others how we are part of the solution to the challenges our communities face due to COVID-19.