

Reopening Our Building  
and  
Resuming In-Person Worship



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## **Introduction**

On March 16, 2020, the Holy Spirit Lutheran Church building was closed due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 virus. This plan describes a care-filled approach to re-opening our church building<sup>1</sup> and resuming in-person activities, particularly worship. Doing this is a challenge which involves much more than just unlocking the church doors and inviting people to come in and worship as they had prior to the closure. This would pose many dangers and risks, and we care too much to let that happen. We love God, so we want our worship to be the best possible. But we also love our neighbor, so we must do everything we can to keep people safe and not cause harm to anyone who comes to worship. We must also operate within the guidelines and restrictions issued by governmental bodies and organizations such as Carroll County, the State of Maryland, the CDC, and the FDA.

Throughout our discussions we have kept in mind our mission to bring our members and the people in the wider community into a closer relationship with Jesus.

## **Congregational Survey**

In June, 2020, the Music and Worship committee conducted a survey of the congregation to determine their attitudes toward returning to in-person results. Forty-four people completed it, either online or on paper. From the answers to the questions and comments that were made, it was clear that the overriding consideration among the respondents was safety for themselves and others. For example, 48% said they would not be interested in returning to in-person worship until adequate testing and contact tracing was in place; 27% wanted to wait for a vaccine. Due to the precautions that would have to be taken, 79.5% said they were not eager to return to in-person worship. (The complete results by question are given in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.) This was taken into account in the development of the steps and procedures for reopening the building. Because of the changing nature of this situation, no timetable was developed. Movement from one step to another of the plan must be approved by the Council.

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1 This plan does not address reopening the Early Childhood Learning Center.

## Steps in Reopening the HSLC Building

Principle 1: The health and well-being of all our members, especially our most at-risk members, will guide all decisions.

Principle 2: Holy Spirit Lutheran Church will comply with all public health guidance and directives from local, state, and national officials. If there is a disparity in recommendations, the stricter one will apply.

	<b>Step 1 Severe Restrictions</b>	<b>Step 2 Restrictions and Capacity Limits</b>	<b>Step 3 More activities resume</b>	<b>Step 4 "New normal"</b>
Worship	Online only	Primary worship online; possibility of private services	Online worship continues. Limited in-person worship.	Online worship continues In-person worship resumes
Communion	No	No	Possibly	Yes
Funerals	No	Private or graveside only	Yes	Yes
Home Visitation	No	No	Possibly	Yes
Office and Staff	Staff and lay leaders work on site as necessary. No visitors.	Staff in building for posted hours. Visitors must call in advance.	Open	Open
Building	Closed except for staff and lay leaders.	Partially open for staff and staff-directed programming	Partially open for staff and staff-directed programming	Open
Meetings (including adult Bible discussion)	Online only	Can be held in building but must also offer online option	Can be held in building but must also offer online option	Can be held in building but online option encouraged
Sunday School	Online only	Online only	TBD	TBD
Fellowship Events	No	Outdoor only	Outdoor, probably not indoor	Yes
Outside Groups	No	No	Only those meeting as of March, 2020.	All current groups. New groups can be hosted.
Target date for completion	06/08/20	TBD: when necessary supplies and equipment are available	TBD	TBD: after development of vaccine and/or therapies

## General Building Use Guidelines

Anyone entering the building for any purpose must follow these best practices for health safety:

- Wear a mask or face covering in the building. In accordance with the governor's executive order, this applies to everyone over the age of 5. There will be a limited supply of masks on hand if you do not have one.
- Answer the questions below:
  - Do you have any new onset of any of the following symptoms: fever or chills; cough; shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; fatigue; muscle or body aches; headache; new loss of taste or smell; sore throat; congestion or runny nose; nausea or vomiting; diarrhea?
  - Have you been in close contact (less than 6 feet for more than 15 minutes) with anyone having symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19?
  - Have you been in any high-risk settings in the last 7 to 10 days? (High-risk settings include large indoor gatherings and travel to a hot spot.)If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", you may not enter the building.
- Provide your name and best contact information on the sign-in sheet at the door. This will be used in the event that contact tracing is required.
- Sanitize your hands before leaving the entry area.
- Maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet at all times, including in the parking lot.

The organizers of an event are responsible for sanitizing the areas that were used using the cleaners supplied at the entrances.

Any use of the building must be scheduled in advance through the church office.

## Worship Options

When appropriate, in-person worship on Sunday mornings will resume. The service will be held in the space that will more easily accommodate physical distancing. The number of services and times will be determined when the decision to hold in-person worship is made.

The spoken liturgy will include scriptures, prayers and a sermon. It will not include any congregational singing or speaking in unison. All worship leaders will wear masks except when they are speaking; masks may be removed then and must be replaced when the speaking is finished. Holy Communion will be celebrated when it can be done safely. The offering will be gathered in a fixed location at the back of the room. As the situation with the virus changes, we will make appropriate adjustments.

In order to attend in-person worship you must:

- Notify the church office that you intend to attend the Sunday morning service by Thursday at noon. This is necessary to insure that we will be able to maintain physical distancing and not exceed the capacity of the room. At that time, your contact information will be collected and you will be asked the screening questions. (Anyone who has not registered may be seated if there is space available and the protocols are followed.)
- Follow all of the general guidelines for use of the building given above.
- Arrive 15 minutes before the start of the service to complete the check-in process.
- Sit in designated areas and at least 6 feet away from others not in your household. Families/households may sit together. The ushers will assist in seating people as necessary.
- Only use the restrooms near the worship space. Please try to avoid using them if at all possible.
- Stay in the worship area. Please do not go into other parts of the building.
- Remain seated until dismissed by an usher at the conclusion of the service.
- Leave the building immediately after being dismissed.
- Follow any directions given by the staff or ushers in order to comply with these guidelines and reduce the risk of transmission.

The online worship service that was begun after our building was closed will continue even after we return to unrestricted in-person worship in Step 4. This will allow those who are unable to attend for any reason to worship. A recording of the service will be posted afterward. DVDs of the service will also be available on request.

All members and friends are encouraged to make a responsible decision about whether to attend worship in-person or to continue using online resources. God's life-giving Word will be proclaimed in both services and the Council asks that you make a healthy decision for you, your family, and your community.

## Appendix 1 – Congregational Survey Results

### 1. When will you feel ready to come back to in-person worship?

Response	Number	Percentage
I am ready to come back now.	5	11
I will not be ready to come back for several more weeks.	6	14
I will not be ready until I believe there is adequate testing and tracing in place.	21	48
I will not be ready until there is a scientifically proven vaccine available for widespread use.	12	27

### 2. In order to resume in-person worship, we will need to have the following precautions in place:

- Worship will be in the Multi-Purpose Room
- Everyone must wear a mask
- Seating arranged with appropriate social distance measures
- Temperatures taken upon entry
- Advance sign-up to maintain physical distancing
- Collecting names and phone numbers for contact tracing
- No singing
- No speaking in unison
- No passing the peace
- No handshaking or hugging
- No fellowship before or after worship.

### How eager are you to return to in-person worship with the above precautions in place?

Response	Number	Percentage
No strong feeling	3	6.8
Not very eager	35	79.5
Eager	3	6.8
Very eager	3	6.8

### 3. With those precautions in place, would you prefer to worship

Response	Number	Percentage
Online	28	64
In-person	9	20
No preference	7	16

**4. When we begin to offer Holy Communion, how likely are you to receive it?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I will receive Holy Communion when it is offered.	14	32
I will not be ready to receive Holy Communion until I feel we are in a safer time.	23	52
I am unsure.	7	16

**5. In order to meet the physical distancing and capacity requirements, are you willing to attend a worship service:**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
On Sunday at a time other than you normally worship	16	36
On a weekday evening	0	0
All of the above	12	27
None of the above	16	36

**6. When in-person worship resumes, how likely are you to utilize worship online? (Circle all that apply.)<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Online worship will continue to be how I participate in worship.	4	10
I will no longer need online worship.	15	36
Online worship is an important part of our ministry whether or not we worship in person	23	55

**7. In order to make in-person worship possible we will need volunteers for new jobs, for example, taking temperatures, recording names and phone numbers of worshippers, and sanitizing the worship space. Are you willing to volunteer?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	9	20
No	18	41
It will depend on what is needed.	17	39

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<sup>2</sup> Although more than one response was permitted for this question, no one gave more than one. Two people who responded on paper did not answer this question.

**8. What age demographic are you part of?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Under 16	0	0
16-30	1	2
31-59	16	36
60-79	17	39
80 and older	10	23