

Return To In-person Worship Protocol

St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Van Wert, Ohio

This protocol is to provide a safe area for in-person worship out of love for you, our neighbors, and the most vulnerable among us.

If you are not feeling well, have a fever or other symptoms of illness, or have been exposed to someone who has shown symptoms, please stay home.

Keep your neighbors safe.

If you are uncomfortable with any of this safety protocol, or uncomfortable attending in-person worship right away, please continue to worship on-line.

The First Month of In-person Worship.

Prior to Gathering

- Exterior doors will be unlocked and propped open 30 minutes prior to services to reduce surface contact. Exterior doors will be propped open after service.
- Sanctuary doors will remain propped open.
- Worship space and restrooms will be cleaned/sanitized before and after worship. Supplies are to be re-stocked as necessary.
- Length of the worship service will be shorter. We will initially have worship services at 8:00 and 10:30.
- Pews are prepared for physical distancing. Pew racks are emptied.
- The gathering area will be prepared for physical distancing as an overflow area.

Gathering

- Maintain a minimum 6' physical distance in all directions. No hugs or handshakes.
- Masks are strongly recommended for people over 2 years old, into and out of worship.
 - Masks may be removed once the worshiper is seated.
 - Worshippers are to bring their own masks and hand sanitizer if possible. Masks will be provided for those who do not have one.
- Greeters and ushers will have different roles.
 - They will not shake hands or hand out bulletins.
 - They will lead by example: good hygiene, wearing a face mask, physical distancing, etc.

- Ushers will seat worshippers beginning in the front of the sanctuary and work toward the back.
- Greeters will provide hand sanitizer for worshippers.

Worship

- Pastor (and later lectors) will not share common books, but rather, read from their own paper or digital device. They may remove their face covering while speaking only if they are 10 feet or more from others.
- The Passing of the Peace will be omitted to help worshipers abstain from touching/hugging.
- Offerings will be collected in offering boxes at the sanctuary doorways before and after worship. We continue to encourage electronic giving.
- Hymnals are not available to worshippers unless they bring their own and take them back home with them. Pew racks are emptied of all contents.
- No Nursery, Children's sermon, or Noah's Park Children's Church.
- There will be no congregational singing, soloists, duets, etc. for the first month of returning to in-person worship. The topic of singing will be revisited on a monthly basis.
- Lighting and extinguishing of the altar candles by the ushers or pastor. We will not have acolytes the first month we return to in-person worship. This issue of acolytes will be revisited on a monthly basis.

Holy Communion

- The Chair of Altar Guild will wash hands and wear a mask before preparing the communion kits.
- When celebrating Holy Communion the packaged kits will be placed in sandwich bags and placed on the pews prior to the worship service. We will practice pew communion.
- The level of involvement of Altar Guild will be revisited on a monthly basis.
- Communicants will take their used communion kits and dispose of them at the sanctuary exits.

Dismissal

- Worshippers may place their offerings in the offering boxes at the sanctuary doorways on their way out.
- Physical distance of six feet must be maintained as people leave the worship space and in the hallway. Worshippers will be dismissed pew by pew similar to that with weddings.
- Face coverings should be worn until people have left the building or finished parking lot conversations at a distance of at least six feet.

- Pastor and other worship leaders will not shake hands or hug people after worship. Greetings and conversations should be done at the appropriate 6' distance.
- There will be no sharing of food, including coffee hours, potlucks, or other typical forms of food-based fellowship before or after worship.

Pastor

- Will wear a face covering when not leading worship.
- Will not wear a face mask when leading worship and preaching, maintaining a safe distance of 10 feet.
- Will attempt to communicate and mingle with people for a short time before and after worship, maintaining a safe distance of 6 feet.

Contingency Items

- In case of a member or guest that attended a worship service test positive for COVID-19, we will
 - Notify the Van Wert County Health Department.
 - Notify the congregation of the positive test. Specifically, those who attended in-person worship for the previous two weeks.
 - Suspend in-person worship for a time.
- Teams are to be developed to oversee ongoing cleaning before and after services.
- Re-evaluate protocol and revise as necessary.

The Second Month of In-person Worship.

- This is wholly dependent on pandemic conditions at that time.