

June 17, 2020

To: St. Paul Lutheran Church Council

From: Re-entry Task Force: Jacque Mohs, chair, Dr. Amy Kimball and Ann Bartelt

Re: Re-Entry Task Force Recommendation

As you all know, we are living in unprecedented times. There is a wealth of information available about the COVID-19 pandemic from many sources; unfortunately, medical, political, and civic experts have conflicting views. Given lives are truly at stake, the decision to once again worship in person is a complicated one. Pastor Brian established a re-entry task force in May, charging us with the following:

- Establish criteria for re-entry
- When it's time, make recommendation for re-entry
- Identify appropriate deep cleaning/routine cleaning required
- Plan for people flow/entry/seating/exiting
- Special service details that are deemed prudent given our current environment
- Communication Strategy

We have researched, debated, surveyed the congregation, prayed for wisdom and guidance, and ultimately have arrived at the following recommendation. We have tried to balance our natural desire to gather together to worship with our responsibility to do our best to keep all congregational members safe.

Establish Criteria for Re-entry

Our taskforce evaluated a number of potential criteria to resume in-person worship. We determined we would need to see the following before resuming in-person worship:

- Alignment with synod guidelines for resuming in-person worship
- State endorsed reopening of businesses and establishments
- Benchmarks for Resuming Public Gatherings criteria that the White House with guidance from the CDC and the Coronavirus Task Force published

Regarding these criteria, we have studied the following and have determined that St. Paul has met the guidelines and will take the appropriate actions to resume in-person worship.

- Monday, June 8th, Bishop Burk provided to pastors of the SE Iowa Synod, a document titled "[Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life.](#)" This guidance was prepared by The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments. The committee also studied guidance from the ELCA, dated May 12, [Considerations for Returning to In-Person Worship.](#)
- The Governor's [proclamation of June 10](#) states that a community event of more than 10 people may be held. Specifically, it says that a church shall implement reasonable measures under the circumstances of each gathering to ensure social distancing of employees, volunteers and other participants, increased hygiene practices, and other public health measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 consistent with guidance issued by the Iowa Department of Public Health.
- The Benchmarks for Resuming Public Gatherings criteria is as follows:

Beginning Criteria	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19 for 2 consecutive weeks.	A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19 for 2 more consecutive weeks. Social Gatherings of up to 10 people	A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19 for 2 more consecutive weeks. Social Gatherings of up to 50 people	An ongoing downward trajectory in the number of reported symptoms, confirmed cases, and/or positive tests for COVID-19. Social Gatherings of more than 50 with 6-ft distance and face coverings.
Except for: People over 65, individuals with serious underlying health conditions: high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma and those whose immune system is compromised.			Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing.

The important point with the preceding chart is that it is not guaranteed to be a left to right progression. At any time, as the statistics warrant, we may shift to a lower level, which comes with more restrictions and considerations.

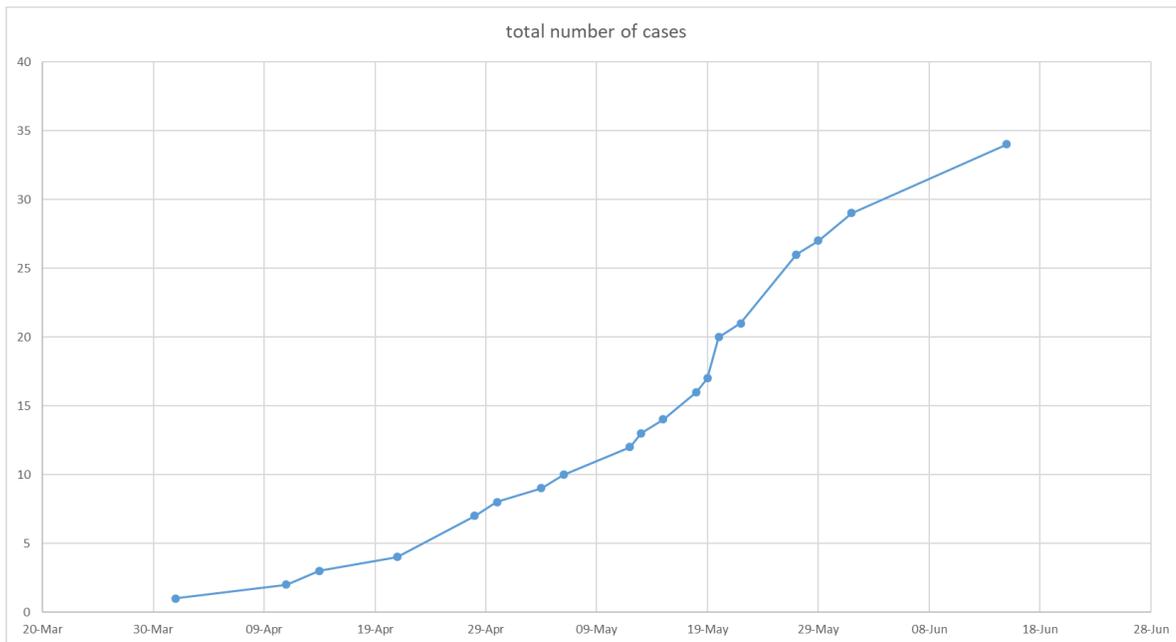
General guidelines apply at every level:

- Stay at home if you're sick, and self-quarantine if you think you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces.
- Use face coverings while in public. Children under 2, those with breathing problems, and those to are unable to remove a mask on their own should not wear face coverings.

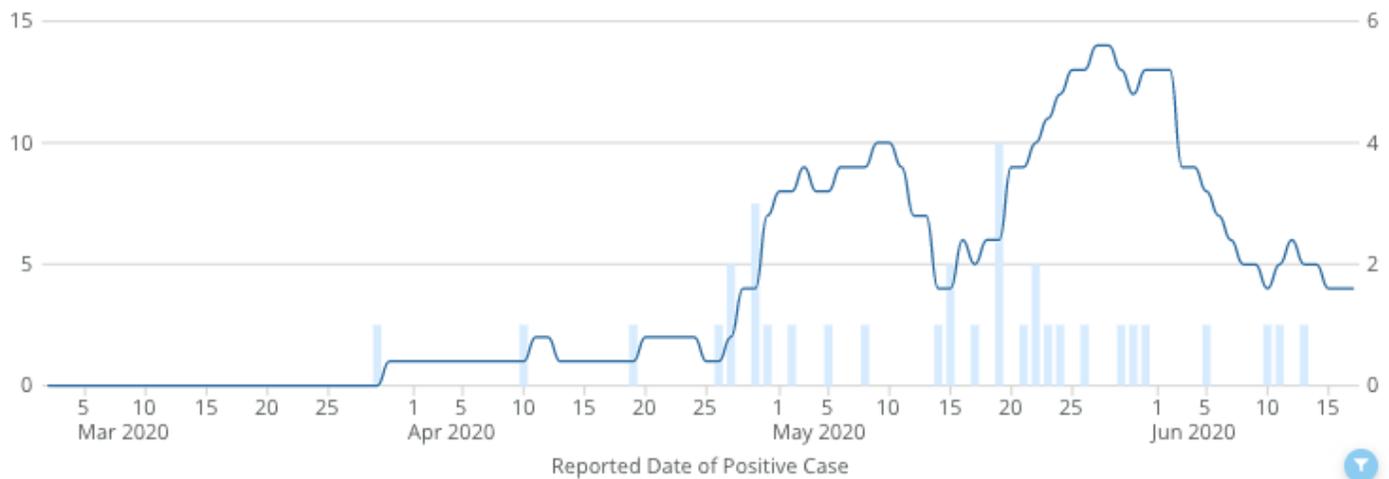
Madison County Positive COVID-19 Diagnosis

While we're seeing an ever-increasing number of confirmed coronavirus cases, we have reports that Madison County is actually seeing a decline in the percentage of individuals testing positive. Given our small numbers of confirmed cases, it is very difficult to speak in terms of absolute numbers. In addition, the information available on the number of tested individuals is difficult to ascertain, so we are relying on the guidance of county health experts. Data from [COVID-19 in Iowa](#) indicates that the percentage of individuals testing positive in Madison County will be in its fifth week of decline by June 28, which would put us in Level 2 on the chart above.

The chart below from the Madison County Public Health shows a slowing of the number of positive cases in the county. The second chart gives further information from [COVID-19 in Iowa](#) on June 17, 2020. It indicates that Madison County has had 34 positive cases, 27 recovered cases, and two deaths.



Positive Cases



County	Positive Cases	Cases Per 100,000 Population
Madison	34	209

When It's time, make recommendation for re-entry

Given the above information and our confidence that we can meet the health and safety recommendations, we believe that we are ready to resume in-person worship with one service on Sunday, June 28. We have given consideration to whether this service should be outdoors, or if it may be indoors. While both an in- or outdoor service will take a significant amount of planning, the outside worship alternative has additional complications - weather (heat and rain), sound system, lack of screen, lack of shade, and uneven ground. Thus, we believe it best to hold service indoors.

Identify Appropriate Deep Cleaning/Routine Cleaning Required

Dr. Amy Kimball has created a cleaning document that highlights what needs to be cleaned and how to clean effectively. We are so fortunate there were several volunteers that performed a deep cleaning of the church on Saturday, June 13th, and Amy was present to educate them on proper cleaning techniques. We'll need to ensure that after each use we thoroughly clean the church, focusing on all surfaces that worshipers may touch. This also holds true after any event that is held in the church.

Logistical Planning

Initially we recommend limited use of our church building. There will be a single way to enter, and we recommend having a separate way to exit. Social distancing will be enforced. We will close classrooms, the kitchen, the nursery and other non-essential rooms. We encourage worshipers to use the rest room before attending the worship service. If the bathroom must be used, signs have been posted on proper use, including sanitizing protocols.

Special Service Details

As we prepare to resume worship, there are many considerations to ensure that we do not facilitate the spreading of the virus. People can have the virus without showing any symptoms, so we will take reasonable precautions to ensure that we keep our parishioners safe. As such, we recommend the following:

- Pastor will lead the service with organist/pianist accompaniment.
- The addition of a worship leader will be determined by Pastor.
- Service will be shortened.
- Social distancing will be observed, with assigned seating based on family size – six feet between attendees and 16 feet between worship leaders and congregation.
- Service will be projected on the screen.
- No bulletins or hymnals will be utilized.
- Offering will be made upon entry rather than passing the plate.
- While we may softly speak in unison, there will be no joint singing.
- Masks will be strongly recommended.
- Sharing of the peace will be via nod or wave.
- Holy Communion will be offered safely and spiritually.
- Entry and exit protocols will be established.
- Signage will be posted, and volunteers will help direct traffic.
- Participants will 'sign up' for worship to ensure attendance allows proper social distancing to be followed.
- Three-tiered communication strategy will be implemented (education prior to, during and after the service, signage and volunteers).
- Recommend recording or broadcasting the live service for those that cannot attend in person.
- No social hour will be held before or after the service.
- Baptisms, weddings and funerals may resume, following the established safety rules.

Communication Strategy

We have been communicating via the Friday announcements, and we also administered a survey May 24-26. Regarding the survey, we received more than 70 responses;

- 49% responding that they are not sure when they would be comfortable returning to group worship
- 36% said they are ready to return to church when it re-opens, and
- 15% thought they would continue worshiping at home for some time.

Our communication strategy needs to ensure that there is a worship option for everyone, and that all feel supported regardless of the decision we make. In addition, we should encourage individuals in high-risk categories to choose a safe way to worship. As Julie Feirer reminded us in her Memorial Day epistle, there are many ways we 'do church', and our primary concern is keeping everyone safe. We've heard many of our members say that they are not concerned about themselves but are very concerned with the safety of those brothers or sisters in high-risk categories.

We recommend extensive communication with the congregation prior to our resuming in-person worship so they know what to expect – both in terms of the service itself and the logistics. There should be signage and volunteers to help reinforce the guidance provided. We recommend the communication be a variety of methods – print, video, phone calls, and distributed via newsletter, Facebook, email, and the church website. In addition, we need to be clear that if confirmed COVID-19 cases accelerate, we will step back and exercise the appropriate caution.

We respectfully submit this recommendation for resuming in-person worship indoors on June 28, 2020, to the Congregation Council for your prayerful consideration. It has been our goal to prioritize the health and safety of our congregants by attending to the recommendations of health officials while also being mindful of our Christian acts as a community of believers: worshiping, praying, and breaking bread. Within our local context and under the limitations imposed by this pandemic, we feel we can have a rich, fulfilling worship experience, together, in one place, with glad and joyful hearts.