

Dear Ascension Family:

Jun 19, 2020

At long last, we are preparing to reunite for congregational worship. It is a time of uncertainty, anticipation, and perhaps apprehension. While Governor Wolf's order never closed houses of worship, like many other organizations we decided to move to virtual worship in support of the civic effort to avoid a steep increase in COVID-19 cases that would overwhelm the health care infrastructure.

Now that this civic initiative has taken its course, we will be joining the rest of the country in taking gradual steps back toward normalcy. Effective as of June 28, we will resume in person worship at our normal time 9:30, but with some changes.

We want to ensure that the way we return follows the available guidance from the CDC and state public health authorities on keeping our members, guests and staff as safe as possible, as much as possible. Some of the immediate changes include:

1. A "deep cleaning" of the full building prior to our first worship together.
2. A practice of social distancing in the sanctuary (6 feet between households), and seating in every other pew.
3. A request that we do not linger inside the building entrances/exits prior to and following worship services. Please enjoy the beautiful weather outside as you visit from six feet apart!
4. The wearing of face coverings indoors in all parts of the building for those who are over age 2 and medically able to do so. (This is not required when someone is working in the building, alone or in a separate contained space.)
5. Placement of face coverings and cleaning supplies around the facility.
6. Posting of CDC information to encourage the CDC recommendations to limit the spread of the virus.
7. A request that EVERYONE sign in when entering the building for worship or for any reason. (In the event we'd need to reach everyone in the building during a certain period.)
8. A temporary "pause" on our food fellowship.
9. Changes in procedures for the worship itself including dispensing with passing of the peace, and passing the offering plate and a change to using disposable communion kits.
10. To limit the need for cleaning and disinfection, the fellowship hall and classroom areas will be taped off. If anyone needs to comfort a child, we will temporarily ask parents to use the narthex.
11. Children's bags will be stored. Please feel free to take one (or more) from the closet on your first visit and keep it in your car for your kids' use during services. Please don't put any bags back in the closet.
12. Hymnals will be stored temporarily and bulletins will be online.
13. We're looking for volunteers to wipe down the hand rails after service - please see Pete Candreva if you can help.

There is one difference in our plans and the CDC guidance that we would like to call your attention to: we will be singing (behind our masks) as a congregation during the service. After discussing it as a council, we just feel this is too big a part of the worship experience to do away with, even temporarily.

We will have additional changes to communicate at the end of summer, as we make plans for resumption of Sunday School and Bible Study.

We realize there may be those in our body who do not feel comfortable yet in joining a public gathering. We are making plans to enable streaming worship services while they are happening live, so that there is an option to worship from your home. Imagine, if you are traveling on vacation, you could still worship with your family at Ascension! Please watch for emails from Barb Marcellus with information on how to access the service remotely. We owe a big thanks to all those involved in our worship ministry for their efforts throughout the stay-at-home orders and their continued efforts as we prepare to reunite.

Happy Father's Day – we're looking forward to seeing everyone as they are able to join worship!

Yours in Christ,
Church Council

Ascension Lutheran Church - 8225 Peebles Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

412-364-4463 / Fax: 412-369-0599

www.ascensionpgh.com

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