



GOOD SHEPHERD
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Summary of the COVID-19 Task Force Recommendations Regarding Reopening [Unanimously Accepted by GSLC Council on August 11, 2020]

The COVID-19 Task Force (CTF) began its work on June 11th, and quickly discovered that there is a massive amount of information available for reopening churches. In order to ensure that the CTF followed credible sources, they used published recommendation documents from the ELCA, the ELCA Southeastern Synod, the CDC, and Church Mutual, the insurer of GSLC. These four (4) documents were the backbone of the CTF's recommendations to the Council. These documents can be found on our website at gslutheran.org, in the FAQ section, under the COVID-19 tab. The CTF also considered documents from state and local governmental and public health organizations.

The ELCA Southeastern Synod (SES) document defined three phases that churches will need to go through in the journey to an eventual "new normal." The CTF quickly realized that preparing to reopen the church required multiple tasks. Phase 1 will not only be the most challenging phase, it will require the most changes to Good Shepherd's operational procedures. The CTF chose to call the preparation period Phase 0. Phase 0 is our current status.

Beginning Phase 1, or advancing to higher phases, is determined by the factors surrounding COVID-19 conditions at the current time. These are referred to in the ELCA Southeastern Synod recommended practices as "benchmark conditions." The primary conditions are "a sustained reduction or stability in new COVID-19 cases for 14 days." Benchmarks need to cover a geographic region wider than just Cherokee County, and therefore a radius of 50 to 100 miles must be considered. There may also be other anecdotal indicators within the region that indicate factors favorable or unfavorable to changes in the church phase. The Council will be constantly monitoring the benchmarks, so that we might reopen safely as soon as possible.

Phases 2 and 3 are needed much further along the timeline and thus will be affected by changes in the COVID-19 infection data, as well as changes to available technology, vaccines, and new treatments. What is common to all 3 Phases of reopening is following the fundamentals of the CDC recommendations: mask wearing, hand sanitizing, social distancing, and staying home if you are not feeling well.

Numerous supplies have been identified as necessary for both Phase 0 and Phase 1. These include touchless thermometers, hand sanitizer supplies, facemasks for those who

forget theirs, etc. Per the CDC, children under 2 years old cannot be required to wear facemasks. The CDC also advises that “deep cleaning” be done by professionals in addition to routine cleaning.

One of the first tasks of the CTF was developing, and publishing to every confirmed member of GSLC, a survey to gather input from GSLC members. An amazing 205 confirmed members responded, and the data was gathered into bar charts that indicated the exact percentages. Additionally, the individual comments from members were captured for consideration by the CTF. The complete survey results and comments are available on our website at gslutheran.org.

Multiple tasks and processes have been identified for resuming worship safely, including entry practices, social distancing, sanctuary capacity, revision of Sunday Servant duties, communion practices, and liturgical practices. The CTF is currently preparing a video demonstration of new Sunday worship processes for the congregation, and we will update you as soon as that is available.

There are numerous opinions about reopening churches, and sometimes there is disagreement with the decisions made. Patience, adaptability, and perhaps a sense of humor, will be necessary as we move forward. The recommendations of the CTF and the decisions of the Council are consistently focused on keeping our congregation as safe as possible, while still experiencing the joy of being together as the community of Christ.