

Guidelines for Attending Worship Services during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Updated October 2020

Introduction

In March 2020, the arrival of COVID-19 became a reality in Iowa. There was so much that we did not yet know about the virus – how it would spread, who it would affect most, how harsh it would be, and so on. Churches, as well as businesses and schools, largely shut down in-person gathering for a time. Since May, most businesses have reopened in some capacity. Most churches, as well, have had worship in-person in some form. Restrictions on churches originally set by Governor Reynolds were lifted in May, as long as there were procedures in place to reduce the likelihood of the virus spreading (distancing, sanitation, etc.).

During 2020, we have learned more and more about the virus, even if there is still much we will not know for some time. We have also seen waves of the virus come through our state (and our county), with no immediate end to the pandemic in sight. At the end of September, the number of reported infections surpassed 33,000,000 worldwide, and the number of deaths related to the virus surpassed 1,000,000, with the true numbers of each almost certainly higher because of various reasons. In Iowa alone, we have seen almost 90,000 confirmed cases and over 1,300 deaths, again with the actual numbers likely higher. But, the damage is not only measured in deaths. Many people who survived have not fully recovered. Some lost limbs, and others suffered heart attacks and strokes, because of clotting caused by the virus. Some continue to battle constant fatigue, coughing, or other factors due to damage caused by the virus. In other words, this is no yearly ‘flu’.

Though the coronavirus continues to spread, the precautions we have had in place continue to offer us a relatively safe gathering space to worship together. Of course, we can never expect to be able to claim ‘zero’ risk for those who worship (even in non-pandemic times!). But, with what we know about how the virus spreads through the air and through the touching of surfaces, we have been able to mitigate the possibility of spread through simple means – distancing, cleaning, and the wearing of masks.

With these updated guidelines, we want to put into writing what we have been doing in practice for some time. In May, there was much more ‘unknown’, and there was a sense (appropriately) that we should do as much planning as possible for each service until we knew how worship would look. Now, especially with what we know, we can continue with simple precautions, even as we have already relaxed some of what was required for planning in May. Yes, the numbers in the state of Iowa continue to be high overall, and COVID-19 may not be going away anytime soon, even when it seems our county trends in the right direction. But, with measures in place, we feel confident that we can continue to worship responsibly together in person.

Below, you will find the updated guidelines that have been reviewed by the pastor, elders, and council. They have been set based on the best information possible at this time and for the safety of all those who attend. If you have any questions or concerns, *please do not hesitate to contact pastor or the church leadership*. We look forward to seeing you in worship with us soon!

-Pastor Squire

Planning to Attend

- ❖ If you have ***symptoms of any kind of sickness, absolutely stay home!***
- ❖ Beginning the week of Sunday, October 4, we will return to having one weekly service – Sundays at 9:00 am. Service size will be constrained only by as many people as we can fit in the sanctuary with physical distancing measures in place. More services may be added if necessary.
- ❖ For the sake of preparation, it is **helpful, but not required, that you contact Pastor to inform him that you plan to attend, and if you desire to take communion.** *We will never turn anyone away for not having registered for Divine Service.* We want you to be in worship with us whenever you can!
- ❖ A mask is required for those who are worshipping. Please plan on wearing it the entire time you are in the building. Masks – both reusable and disposable – are available for those who need one. *We do not expect very young children to wear masks.* Please do not feel like you must refrain from attending a service because your baby or young child does not have a mask on!

- ❖ If you cannot wear a mask for any reason, please contact Pastor for possible accommodations.
- ❖ Plan on physical distancing! (Staying at least *six feet* away from those outside your family group).
- ❖ Hand sanitizer will be available for those in attendance.
- ❖ Restrooms will be open, but we encourage you to use the restroom at home before coming to church. If you need the restroom, there will be disinfectant wipes available for wiping off surfaces that you have touched. Because of the space available in the restroom, we ask that you also limit it to one person/family unit at a time whenever possible.
- ❖ Remember, washing your hands properly with soap and water is just as – or more – effective as using hand sanitizer. It would be wise to wash your hands thoroughly before/after attending a service.

Arriving at Immanuel

- ❖ You may enter on either the north or south sides of the church.
- ❖ If the weather is nice enough, doors may be propped open. Otherwise, an usher may be posted at the door to open it for you. If not, you are still free to enter at your discretion.
- ❖ Bulletins will be available as you enter the sanctuary.
- ❖ Available pews are those without cushions (for ease of cleaning). Again, please allow for proper physical distancing between individuals and/or family groups both in the same pew and between pews.

Worship & Communion

- ❖ We hope to transition back to the use of hymnals. Hymnals would be available for worship and be rotated in for use every other week to allow plenty of time for any potential germs to die. You may also take a hymnal home for yourself and bring it each week for use as ‘your’ hymnal instead.
- ❖ A short children’s message will be offered to children in their pews following the prayers. Children will be sent home with an activity in place of in-person Sunday school, until it begins again.
- ❖ Communion will be offered at each service, but you are certainly not required to receive it to attend.
- ❖ If you are communing, please wait for an usher to release your pew.
- ❖ Pastor will distribute alone with his mask on and will have sanitized his hands before giving Communion. Disposable cups will be used. After each family group comes forward, Pastor will gently drop the bread in the hands of those communing (or bless those who are not receiving). The cups will be placed sparsely in the tray, so that communicants are only touching the cup they plan to take. Those communing may lower their masks to commune, but should replace them once they are done communing. Pastor will offer a short dismissal (“Go in peace”) and will speak the usual dismissal (“Now may the body and blood...”) to everyone once Communion is over. When communicants are done with the cups, they may place them in the container available in the front before returning to their pews.
- ❖ If you are not communing, you may remain in your pews and sing or pray during the distribution.
- ❖ Offering plates will *not* be passed. Instead, they will be placed at the back of the sanctuary if you would like to leave an offering on your way out.

Following the Service

- ❖ As usual, each individual and family will be released from the sanctuary by an usher.
- ❖ If you have your offering, please drop it in the plate on your way out of the sanctuary.
- ❖ Bulletins may be dropped in the recycling bin in the narthex if you do not want to keep them.
- ❖ There will be no hand-shaking on the way out. Again, please practice proper distancing!
- ❖ There will not yet be fellowship time inside the church building following the service. Please plan on not congregating for long periods of time in the fellowship area, but instead head outside to share a time of fellowship with appropriate physical distancing.
- ❖ There will continue to be ***no in-person Sunday school after the service*** for now (this may change at some point in the near future, though it will look different than usual). Adult Bible class will begin again in October. Depending on numbers, we will either meet in the library, fellowship area, or basement.

Clarification is necessary regarding our request for "registering" for church:

Often it is difficult for people to predetermine attending church. There are many valid reasons, such as work issues, health of small children, etc. Please don't avoid coming to church just because you weren't able to call ahead of time. At current levels of attendance, we can still safely accommodate many more at safe distancing. Pastor prepares extra communion elements, ready on the trays, but if possible, it is still *suggested* that you let him know in advance that you want to receive Holy Communion. Again, please don't avoid coming just because it wasn't possible for you to pre-register. Thank you.

Pastor's cell phone number is 563 209 1604.

Or leave a message on the answering machine at church - 713 4782.

(Please note that the office is not staffed on Fridays and Saturdays.)

Office hours are Monday through Thursday, 8AM - noon.