

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are currently witnessing an alarming increase of confirmed COVID-19 cases within our local area — especially right here in Joplin and Jasper and Newton counties. While I certainly join our wider community in a desire to re-engage and return “normal” activities such as restaurant dining, shopping, going back to the office, talking face-to-face with you and others, and gathering with the people of God’s assembly, I also cannot ignore the evidence of ongoing and growing danger. Over the past two days alone, at least 40 new cases have been identified and reported. We must consider those 40 cases as just the tip of a large, perilous iceberg. Because Missouri is still only providing tests to people exhibiting symptoms, the actual number of newly spreading cases of COVID-19 within our community is likely much, much larger than we know. It is those unknown cases that present the greatest danger — not just to us (and I know it’s easy to dismiss care for ourselves in this), but to all the people around us whose lives are intertwined with ours in ways both seen and unseen.

As we now know well, COVID-19 is not just another type of flu. It is something quite different. It is much more communicable. It remains much more hidden. It is proving to be much more deadly. With deep love for each of you, I must urge us to remain cautious and refrain from contact where and when possible.

I recognize that this is not an easy thing to do. For those times when we must venture out into the community, it can be very hard to resist shaking someone’s hand when it is offered to you. It can be difficult to remember to put on and continue to wear face masks. It can be frustrating to be absent from friends, neighbors, and family during birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other celebrations. But that is what it will take in order to move through this experience and into the new life for our community that is waiting to emerge.

Please, let us help one another in doing this and let us also help our neighbors in maintaining safe protocols as well!

With all this in mind, your church council, together with Bishop Candeia, the Central States Synod, and the entire ELCA, has been very attentive to guidance from government, medical, and scientific sources as well as church guidance. We are all eager to return to in-person worship. I, myself, long for this as much as anyone. However, out of love for one another, we must do so only when safe conditions have been established and according to the plan that has been approved by our council and endorsed by our bishop. Again, I recognize the voice within us that may be saying, “I am not worried about myself,” but we must not let that voice overpower our baptismal call to be servants to others. And right now, our primary service to others takes the shape of not unnecessarily risking the health of our neighbors and friends. We must not let that voice push aside the fact that we ourselves could be a carrier of this disease and just simply not know it because we aren’t suffering from any of the symptoms that others are exhibiting.

Be assured that Peace Lutheran Church does have a plan for returning to in-person worship. Working with the council, I am monitoring numbers each and every day looking for the possibility of announcing a date that we can regather. Specifically, as identified by the CDC and other national guidance, we are looking for that two-week period of declining cases. As of today, the earliest possible Sunday at which this could be achieved is now pushed back to June 29. If the Joplin community as a whole, including each and every one of us, pull together and work to reduce our interactions and bring down the count of new cases each week, we can certainly get there. Let us maintain our vigilance, let us continue to keep watch — think of the coming weeks as a season of Advent! We need that type of hope and the type of mutual action that can be driven by such hope!

Once we get there — whether it’s on June 29 or, if necessary, later, things will look different. We will not be returning to “normal.” Instead, we will be gathering the assembly anew. And in doing that, we will have the opportunity to experience worship and liturgy with fresh eyes, fresh ears, fresh learning, fresh experience, and fresh love for one another’s presence. I am so eager for that day!

As we prepare for that day, here are some things for you to begin to consider and plan toward:

- Our assembly will gather with extra attention to safe health. For everyone, a screening interview will be part of entering the building. Face masks will be required. You will be asked to keep 6-foot distances from one another (and seating in our sanctuary has been arranged to help you do that). Signs will be posted to help us remember policies of washing hands and using hand sanitizer.
- We will not immediately return to full use of our building. When we begin to regather, it will be only for worship. The kitchen and fellowship hall and nursery room will remain closed for now. You will be encouraged to not linger in our narthex/welcome center space. Instead, please remain in your car until it is time for worship. Upon entering, please proceed immediately to the sanctuary worship space and take a seat apart from people who are from different households than yours. Bible studies and other meetings will need to continue taking place online or by phone.
- As we begin to regather as an assembly in worship, we will take up the liturgy in slow and very thoughtful ways. We will start first with elements of the Service of the Word and Morning Prayer. Doing this will help us not only to maintain healthful practices but also to experience elements of the liturgy that we may never have realized were there! While it won't be the same as before COVID-19, I promise to do everything I can to lead the assembly of Peace Lutheran Church through meaningful worship.

Below is a copy of Peace Lutheran Church's Plan for Regathering the Assembly Anew. You are invited to read and consider the details in this plan. As you do so, please remember that the plan is not yet complete. Just as the City of Joplin's plan also will be further formed in the months ahead, Peace Lutheran's plan will likewise be further formed. We will do that in cooperation with the city's plan and also in continuing consultation with Bishop Candea.

If you have any questions about this message or about Peace Lutheran's plan, please send those to the church office. I will work with our church council to answer any of your questions as best as possible.

Now, as the health care providers of our community take up care and concern for the growing number of cases in our community, let us pray:

Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Although we need to still be physically apart for a while longer, remember we are never separated from God. Just as God promised Jacob, so Jesus – Emmanuel – promises us, "I am with you always." May this peace of God be with you now.

Together in Christ,
Rich

Plan for Gathering the Assembly Anew

Peace Lutheran Church

Joplin, Missouri

Adopted by Peace Lutheran Church Council on 24 May 2020

Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For the Lord is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the sheep of God's hand.—ELW Morning Prayer Psalmody

Introduction

In Holy Baptism, we welcome one another into the body of Christ and into shared mission. We invite one another to join in giving thanks and praise to God and to bear God's creative and redeeming word to all the world. This assembly of the baptized, what we commonly call "the church," is then a concrete expression of Christ's body and the mission that we share with one another. When this assembly is gathered on Sundays to join in worship, that gathering is initiated by God. God initiates worship so that we, the assembly, may come together, hear God's word, receive Christ's meal, and be sent out again. The ongoing and continuing pattern of these actions has this purpose: it forms us as a community of God's people. As an assembly, the Holy Spirit gathers us so that we may acknowledge ourselves to be in God's and one another's presence.¹

The arrival of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) severely affected the gathering of all God's assemblies. In responding to the needs and welfare of our surrounding communities and joining efforts to limit and contain the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by this new coronavirus, the patterns of assembly's gathering are broken. Worship services are paused. Physical presence with one another is absent or limited. The ongoing cycle of Sundays as both the day of resurrection and the completion of creation, both the great first day and the eighth day, feels interrupted and, for some, even shattered.

But in the breaking of familiar patterns, rituals, and cycles, space is opened to experience anew the worship that God initiates in gathering us as an assembly. Indeed, the breaking of familiar patterns and symbols for the sake of the assembly is not new at all. The story of the assembly's worship is an ongoing tale of encountering and then living into such brokenness. Since the first Easter Sunday, since the first assemblies gathered in Jerusalem, Corinth, Galatia, Rome, and beyond, since people were first welcomed through baptism and fed a shared meal as means of God's grace, this has been true.

Lamentation breaks against thanksgiving. Word breaks against meal. Song breaks against silence. Prayer breaks against action and advocacy. Table breaks against font. Law breaks against gospel. Receiving breaks against giving. Forgiveness breaks against call. Gathering itself breaks against sending. And, within the worship of God's assembly, these things break not in a war with one another, but in a great dispersion and reshaping that overflows with abundant depth, meaning, grace, love, and life. They are not instances of one or the other, but "both...and...."

A form of such brokenness lives with the memory of the assembly of Peace Lutheran Church. Nine years ago, in 2011, the assembly experienced a brokenness of time before the devastating tornado that rolled across Joplin and time after that tornado.

¹The Sunday Assembly: Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p 103.

It was an experience of both literal and symbolic breaking, dispersion, and reshaping. Now, in this time, the assembly is once again introduced to a new experience of brokenness: the pre-pandemic world before COVID-19 broken against a post-pandemic world struggling in the wake of COVID-19. Distancing breaks against relationship. Face masks break against faithful trust. Contact tracing breaks against mission and community involvement. Caution breaks against humility. Guidance and regulations break against healing and hope. Not in war. Not in battle. But as things that are “both...and....”

Within this understanding, the assembly of Peace Lutheran Church located in Joplin, Missouri, can plan not simply to “reopen” or “resume” church as it was. Truly, that will not be possible. As Bishop Candeia wrote in her letter to the synod on April 28, 2020:

I cannot emphasize enough we will not be coming back to our churches in the same way that we left them. This pandemic has profoundly changed every fabric of our society, including our churches. We will have to do things differently, constantly adjusting as things continue to evolve. In some ways coming back together will be more challenging than closing our doors for the past several weeks.

Understanding the presence of this profound change in our world, the need to do things differently, and the challenge of the journey ahead, the assembly known as Peace Lutheran Church can plan to be gathered anew. This document outlines and describes that plan.

Framework of the Plan

Peace Lutheran’s plan for gathering the assembly anew is organized and built upon the advice and direction of the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in coordination with these additional primary frameworks, regulations, and guidance documents:

- City of Joplin Plan for Response and Recovery(April 29,2020, <https://www.joplinmo.org/1081/Response-and-Recovery-Plan>).
- Guidance for Implementing the Opening Up America Again Framework, United States Centers for Disease Control (April 24, 2020, unpublished, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6889330-Guidance-for-Opening-Up-America-Again-Framework.html>;<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/6935-CDC-opening-guidelines/e1a8802d0d76b3eb43a8/optimized/full.pdf>).
- Considerations for Returning to In-person Worship: Being Church Together During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (May12,2020, <https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/returning-to%20In-person-worship.pdf>).

To associate and reference easily with local, legally binding orders, recommendations, and guidance, Peace Lutheran’s plan is intentionally aligned to the four phases identified by the City of Joplin. Guidance referenced and integrated from other sources is cross walked from their originating frameworks into to these same four phases.The City of Joplin identifies these phases as follows:

- Phase 1: Slow the Spread
- Phase 2: Reopen, State by State [Community by Community] a.k.a. Recovery
- Phase 3: Establish Protection Then Lift All Restrictions
- Phase 4: Rebuild Our Readiness for the Next Pandemic

For Peace Lutheran Church, these same phases are contextualized for the assembly and named in this way:

- Phase 1: Pausing In-Person Gathering
- Phase 2: Gathering Anew to Open the Word
- Phase 3: Giving Thanks and Helping Each Other to Eat and Drink in Meal-Fellowship

Phase 1: Pausing In-Person Gathering

Phase 1 corresponds to conditions in which strict physical distancing or shelter-in-place orders must be maintained to slow the spread of the COVID-19 disease. The context for this phase is that significant or uncontrolled transmission of the disease is present within the region, emerging or current hot spots are identified, or health system capacity is exceeded. During this phase, the assembly refrains from all in-person worship and other in-person activities. Peace Lutheran Church effectively entered Phase 1 on March 16, 2020, when Bishop Candea recommended pausing in-person worship and activities.

While refraining from in-person gatherings and events, the assembly of Peace Lutheran Church nevertheless endeavors to continue serving its call to ministry and mission in the following ways:

•**Worship** –In lieu of in-person worship, the assembly is invited to join together through Sunday worship devotionals prepared by Peace Lutheran’s pastoral leadership. The worship devotionals are delivered through both email and the church’s web site. Members are invited to engage in a familiar pattern of Gathering, Word, Intercessory Prayer, and Sending. Where and when possible, members of the assembly are invited to share in these devotions together with one another and/or neighbors through phone or other telecommunication channels.

•**Communication** –In early March, Peace Lutheran Church updated its calling tree to facilitate both practical and emergency communication as well as ongoing mutual care among the assembly’s members. Combined with previously established email, web site, and social media communication channels, Peace Lutheran Church is effectively maintaining active, frequent, and regular communication with the assembly and keeping members well informed of evolving plans. Postal mail and phone calls are also used to communicate with members who do not have access to electronic communication channels.

•**Meetings, small groups, youth activities, etc.** –During Phase 1 conditions, council meetings are conducted via Zoom with follow up communication via email as needed. All other meetings, small groups, and fellowship activities are suspended.

•**Facility** –While in Phase 1, Peace Lutheran’s facility receives rounds of deep cleaning in accordance with CDC and EPA guidelines(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>; <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>). Additionally, with the pause of in-person worship and activities at Peace Lutheran Church’s facilities, HVAC settings were adjusted for minimal energy usage and the building was otherwise secured in a “standby” mode.

•**Stewardship** –Within Phase 1, financial offerings and support for the assembly’s ministries are encouraged to be sent electronically or via postal mail. The church’s grounds, including its outdoor walking path, continues to be maintained in service to the community’s health as a place of safe and appropriately distanced exercise. In addition, the assembly’s “Little Library” ministry takes on a secondary stewardship role as members are invited to share canned or other package food items with local neighbors through this ministry channel.

•**Addressing loss and grief** –As in-person gatherings are necessarily prohibited or severely limited during Phase 1 conditions, the assembly addresses loss and grief as best as possible through texts, email, phone calls, social media, and other appropriately distant channels. As necessary, funerals are conducted according to local regulations —typically graveside services with only small numbers of immediate family present. As context permits, the assembly will invite members to schedule funerals with cremated remains or other memorial services at a later time.

Triggers for Moving to Phase 2: Gathering Anew to Open the Word

In accordance with national, state, local, churchwide, and synodical advice, Peace Lutheran Church identifies the following gating criteria as prerequisites to moving to Phase 2:

1. Sustained decrease in prevalence of cases within the surrounding region for at least 14 days;
2. Hospitals are able to treat all patients with COVID-19 without crisis standards of care;
3. All symptomatic people can be tested;
4. Public health can maintain active case and contact isolation and monitoring; and,
5. The Bishop's office has approved a congregational plan for the assembly to gather in worship.

1. Sustained decrease in prevalence of cases for at least 14 days

While its facility is located within the Joplin, Peace Lutheran Church serves a surrounding community that extends from Southwest Missouri into Northeast Oklahoma and Southeast Kansas. As a result, for purposes of passing this criteria, Peace Lutheran Church will consider the prevalence of cases within a surrounding 11-county region. This includes the counties of Jasper, Newton, Barry, Barton, Dade, Lawrence, and McDonald within Missouri as well as Ottawa and Delaware counties in Oklahoma and Cherokee and Crawford counties in Kansas.

2. Hospitals are able to treat all patients with COVID-19 without crisis standard of care

The City of Joplin currently reports that its regional hospitals have been able to treat all patients with COVID-19. The Joplin Health Department is working with hospital partners to determine metrics to share that will quantify this element.

3. All symptomatic people can be tested

The City of Joplin reports that testing has significantly improved since the start of the outbreak in our region. With the new testing clinic coming online it is anticipated that all symptomatic people can be tested. Testing is also available for all healthcare workers and first responders. Additional capacity will be pursued to include rapid result testing and antibody testing as they become available.

4. Public health can maintain active case and contact isolation and monitoring

The Joplin Health Department identifies that, currently, public health can maintain active case and contact isolation and monitoring. The department has taken steps to increase the capacity to conduct epidemiology activities. For the foreseeable future, case investigation, isolation, and quarantine can be maintained.

5. The Bishop's office has approved a congregational plan for the assembly to gather in worship.

In letters dated April 28 and May 4, Bishop Candea instructed that congregations served by individuals under covenant by authorization of the Bishop must submit their plan to the synod offices before in-person will be authorized again and before their covenanted leader will be authorized by the Bishop's office to preside again. Peace Lutheran Church is such a congregation and, as a result, the decision to begin worshipping again in person will be made by Peace Lutheran's church council, covenanted leader, and the Bishop working together and depend upon authorization by the Bishop's office.

Phase 2: Gathering Anew to Open the Word

Closely aligned with requirements and recommendations for places of worship in the City of Joplin's Plan for Response and Recovery: Phase 2 (Reopen, a.k.a. Recovery), Peace Lutheran Church's Phase 2 will unfold slowly and carefully over multiple steps.

During Phase 2, the assembly of Peace Lutheran Church will join the wider Joplin community in taking steps to reopen and recover, while still implementing multiple measures to check the spread of disease. The City of Joplin recognizes that when reopening the community, it is vital that it occurs with ultimate regard for maintaining life and reducing morbidity. If the community is reopened too aggressively, the virus can spread quickly, overwhelming the healthcare and public health systems, nullifying much of the work and community sacrifice that has been made.

It is also important that individual communities and counties across Southwest Missouri take these steps in a coordinated manner, adjusting as needed.

The four steps of Joplin's Phase 2 are identified with respect to Peace Lutheran as follows:

1. Reopen with occupancy limitations, no mass gatherings.
2. Reduce limitations, reintroduce limited mass gatherings.
3. Remove limitations, maintain limited mass gatherings.
4. Expand mass gatherings.

Movement through each step will be determined by the spread or containment of disease. Each step within Phase 2 should be a minimum four weeks and may be as long as several months. If the spread of COVID-19 increases to unacceptable levels, the recommendation is to move backwards through the steps up to and including resuming Phase 1 conditions.

Throughout the steps, physical distancing standards must be applied, which includes remaining physically separated by at least 6 feet at all times and frequent disinfecting of surfaces of common areas and in between groups' use of a space. This provision shall apply in all situations. During Phase 2, travel outside of the community and region should only occur for essential activities and members of the assembly are encouraged to abide within this official guidance.

Throughout the duration of Phase 2, vigilant surveillance of available data is required. Using data to drive decision-making in gathering the assembly anew will allow for a balanced, responsive approach that also keeps Peace Lutheran coordinated with and responsive to its local and regional context.

Within this phase, the City of Joplin invites the community to individual and corporate responsibility as the most important component, while recognizing it as the most challenging to ensure. The success and continued reopening of the community will depend on large-scale compliance with the guidance that has been issued. While community leaders are responsible for determining the timing and implementation of reopening, the full adoption of the spirit behind the steps is incumbent on everyone.

Churches are specifically invited by the City of Joplin into this community effort of mutual responsibility. Applying physical distancing strategies, including the limitations of occupancy, maintaining a six-foot distance, providing remote accessibility, and not allowing anyone with symptoms to be present will greatly affect the community's wellbeing.

The City's invitation informs that it is each of our own individual decisions and actions that will ultimately determine the spread of COVID-19. Diseases are fueled by sick people in contact with healthy people and insufficient hygienic practices. We also know that people can spread disease up to 48 hours before becoming symptomatic. Choosing to abide by requirements and recommendations at each step of reopening will allow our community to more quickly emerge from the effects of COVID-19. When we focus on the community's response and recovery, not just ourselves, we all benefit.

All Steps

The City of Joplin has established and enacted the twelve requirements to which all places of worship must comply throughout all steps of Phase 2. Within its own implementation of Phase 2, the assembly of Peace Lutheran Church and its church council agree to honor and uphold these twelve requirements in these ways:

1. No employee who presents any symptom of COVID-19 will be allowed to work on the premises of Peace Lutheran Church. Symptoms of COVID-19 include but are not limited to fever (100.4° or more), cough, shortness of breath, chills, headache, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell. Each employee will self-screen prior to every shift, including taking temperature. Any employee who presents any symptom of COVID-19 shall be sent home immediately.

2. Any non-employee who presents any symptom of COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the premises. Symptoms of COVID-19 include but are not limited to fever (100.4° or more), cough, shortness of breath, chills, headache, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell. Peace Lutheran Church will screen each non-employee prior to entering the premises. Any non-employee who presents any symptom of COVID-19 shall be denied entry to the premises.
3. No sign-in sheets, touch pads, or touch surfaces shall be required for entry to the premises.
4. Hand sanitizer or hand washing stations (e.g. hand sinks) shall be available to all employees and non-employees.
5. All equipment and surfaces, including microphones and pulpits, will be disinfected after each use. All other frequently touched surfaces, including but not limited to counters, door handles, handrails, light switches, restrooms, and water fountains shall be disinfected at least hourly. All occupied spaces will be disinfected after each use. Disinfectants must be EPA-registered and labeled as bactericidal, fungicidal, and virucidal.
6. Lobby, reception, kitchen, classroom, and fellowship areas will not be used. When arriving in advance of worship, people will be advised to wait in their vehicles until worship starts.
7. No more than three persons will be seated together. Sanctuary seating will be arranged in groups of two or three chairs separated by at least six feet of space as measured from the nearest persons from each group. Only family members from the same household will be permitted to sit together in the same group of chairs.
8. Persons will not self-serve any food or drink. Offering plates will not be passed. A single offering point will be provided that requires no contact. Online and mail offerings are encouraged. Bibles, hymnals, pens, and information cards will be removed temporarily from the back of chairs.
9. Individuals who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions will be advised to not enter the building.
10. In-person worship services will be conducted in ways that ensure social distancing.
11. All employees and non-employees entering the building will be required to wear a non-surgical mask that completely covers the nose and mouth at all times during Steps 1 and 2. Face masks will be highly recommended and encouraged during Steps 3 and 4.
12. The nursery room space will be closed.

Step 1: Reopen with occupancy limitations, no mass gatherings

Within Step 1, the community begins to relax mitigation strategies and to cautiously resume some normal activities while keeping many measures in place to limit physical interactions and the spread of disease. Individuals at high risk should continue to stay at home and not interact with others except for vital activities.

In accordance with City of Joplin regulations, the assembly may gather anew for in-person worship at Peace Lutheran Church, but attendance will be restricted to 30 people (25% of the authorized sanctuary occupancy in accordance with City of Joplin regulations). The assembly will continue to apply physical distancing strategies throughout the building and grounds. When possible, other operations of the church will continue to be conducted remotely and online. Such operations include but are not limited to administrative functions, meetings, bible studies, and other small groups. Additionally, Peace Lutheran Church will comply with the City of Joplin's twelve Phase 2 requirements for reopening places of worship as outlined above.

Within the context of this first step for gathering the assembly anew for in-person worship, Peace Lutheran Church will follow additional guidelines as shaped and encouraged by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Central States Synod and described below. (Note that guidance overlapping with the City of Joplin's 12 requirements for places of worship is not duplicated in this description.)

Preparation and Communication

- The assembly of Peace Lutheran Church is attended largely by members with demographics that are indicative of higher risk from COVID-19 with the primary risk factor being over age 65. Alongside this risk factor, however, the assembly attends generally in small numbers. A typical Sunday worship may see attendance of approximately 20. Within this level of attendance, there is ample room within Peace Lutheran's sanctuary to accommodate physical distancing strategies. The assembly's use of chair seating allows for flexible seating arrangements that will be used to reinforce those strategies. Nevertheless, all individuals at high risk will be encouraged to continue staying at home. For those who do remain at home, electronic copies of worship folders, sermons, and other material will be made available.
- During Phase 2, Peace Lutheran Church will continue to employ calling trees, postal mail, and electronic communication via email, web site, and social media to inform the assembly of news, events, changes, and other information relevant to the assembly's gathering, ministry, and mission.
- Signs posted in entry ways, pass-through spaces, and restrooms will be used to help communicate relevant church policies and best hygiene practices.
- In accordance with City of Joplin regulations for places of worship during Phase 2, Peace Lutheran Church will screen all people entering the building for worship. Those identified as ineligible for entry will be protected from social stigma and welcomed to participate from home via the assembly's online worship devotionals and other online worship opportunities available through the Central States Synod.

Physical Building and Grounds

- As the largest single space within the building, the sanctuary allows for the greatest degree of physical distancing and will be the only space utilized for gathering the assembly in worship. The lobby/narthex will be used as pass-through space to enter the sanctuary and will not otherwise be utilized.
- During this phase, the church office will always be locked and accessed only as necessary and only by church employees. Peace Lutheran's covenant leader will access the Pastor's Office only via the direct door to the outside or the door to the internal hallway. The mail/copy room is to be locked and accessed only by church council and staff and only as necessary.
- HVAC systems will be set to reach desired room temperatures in advance of worship to minimize activation of system fans during worship. Ceiling and other fans are not to be used during worship to minimize unnecessary distribution of air. Weather permitting; sanctuary exit doors to the outside may be propped open slightly to reduce recirculation of air.
- Restroom distancing will be encouraged. Main restroom doors are to be propped open so that touch can be minimized. Use of a restroom by one person at a time will be encouraged.
- Worship bulletins will not be distributed. The assembly's participation in worship will be led by voice and/or use of the projection screen.

Hygiene and Safety

- Peace Lutheran Church will seek to make available non-surgical face masks for those who arrive without them.

Physical Distancing

- Normal practices for recording worship attendance will be maintained to aid COVID-19 contact tracing efforts if needed.
- Movement in worship will be reduced to minimize occupying of the same air space and the likelihood of inadvertent close contact among people.
- A greeter will welcome and screen all people gathering for worship at the main door to the facility and direct people to proceed immediately to seats in the sanctuary. (Optionally, welcoming and screening may also take place at the door that exits directly from the sanctuary to the north parking lot area.) The screening process will also be utilized to encourage physical distancing and create appropriate space between entry to the sanctuary. At the close of worship during the Sending, the assembly will be dismissed by chair groupings to again encourage appropriate distance as people exit the building.

Speaking, Singing, and Playing Instruments in Worship

- Singing together, even from a distance, is one of the riskiest behaviors due to the spread of aerosol and droplets that can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air. A cloth mask is unlikely to protect you or your neighbor while singing. For this reason, the assembly will gather with piano or other percussive music only during this time.
- Because similar caution applies to unison speaking and communal speech, the assembly will be invited to remain silent and/or employ soft speaking tones during worship. For each worship service, a member of the assembly will be designated to carry the primary voice of the assembly in any dialogs or responsive readings and prayers.
- Peace Lutheran Church will encourage members to order hymnals to keep and use at home, especially if they are unable to rejoin the assembly yet and must continue to worship at home for some time.

Worship Practices

- The assembly will continue to share the peace using the sign language gestures learned in early March (<https://twitter.com/deafhannah/status/1235564957720350721?s=20>). The assembly will be encouraged to remain within their chair groupings while sharing the peace and to maintain physical distance.
- Peace Lutheran Church will avoid greeting “receiving lines” at the door before and after worship.

Holy Baptism

- During this time, Peace Lutheran Church will keep the baptismal font empty of water in order to avoid and discourage the practice of remembering your baptism by touching the water. The assembly will be instructed to remember their baptism by making the sign of the cross.
- In the event that a baptism is authorized by the Bishop’s office during this time, the font will be sanitized and filled with fresh water prior to the baptism.

Holy Communion

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has announced that the practice of sharing in Holy Communion is not advised until communities are well into final steps and

phases when gatherings of 50 or more people are permitted. The Bishop's office of the Central States Synod has expressed similar care and concern. For congregations served by covenant leaders, such as Peace Lutheran Church, Holy Communion is not authorized until the Bishop has granted approval. This plan anticipates that such approval is likely to coincide at the earliest with Steps 3 or 4 of Phase 2. Upon approval and authorization, resuming Holy Communion still will remain a mutual decision among the church council, the covenant leader, and the Bishop's office and may not occur immediately. Delaying Holy Communion to Phase 3 is a possibility of this plan.

Worship Leadership

- During Steps 1 and 2 of Phase 2, worship leaders will join the assembly in wearing face masks.
- The presiding ministers will lead worship from the ambo/pulpit side of the chancel. The pulpit microphone is not to be shared during this time.
- Piano and instrumental music will be led from the piano side of the chancel. The piano microphone is not to be shared during this time.
- Preachers and presiders will be mindful of physical distancing when speaking, especially because leaders need to project their voices.
- Leaders will refrain from greeting worshipers at the door before or after worship.

Weddings and Funerals

- The church building may be used to conduct funerals or weddings at this step, but only for immediate family (fewer than 10 people). All guidelines and rules outlined above must be followed.

Step 2: Reduce limitations, reintroduce limited mass gatherings

While not currently specified by the City of Joplin, transition to Step 2 is likely to coincide with a sustained community decrease in prevalence of COVID-19 cases for at least 28 days. Peace Lutheran will consider a similar threshold for the surrounding 11-county region.

Within Step 2, the community continues the process of carefully reopening by relaxing occupancy limitations and begins to resume mass gatherings on a limited basis. All interactions within the community are required to maintain physical distancing strategies. High risk individuals should continue to limit interactions to those that are considered vital.

Complying with City of Joplin rules, the assembly may gather for in-person worship, but attendance will be restricted to 60 people (50% of the authorized sanctuary occupancy). The assembly will continue to apply physical distancing strategies throughout the building and grounds. When possible, other operations of the church will continue to be conducted remotely and online. Such operations include but are not limited to administrative functions, meetings, bible studies, and other small groups. Additionally, Peace Lutheran Church will comply with the City of Joplin's twelve Phase 2 requirements for reopening places of worship as outlined above.

Within the context of Step 2, all other guidelines, practices, and rules outlined above continue to be applied except as noted below.

Weddings and Funerals

- The church building may be used to conduct funerals or weddings at this step, but only for gatherings of fewer than 25 people. All other guidelines and rules outlined above must be followed.

Step 3: Remove limitations, maintain limited mass gatherings

While not currently specified by the City of Joplin, transition to Step 3 is likely to coincide with a sustained community decrease in prevalence of COVID-19 cases for at least 42 days. Peace Lutheran will consider a similar threshold for the surrounding 11-county region.

Within Step 3, the community allows for further reopening, while still limiting mass gatherings, which are a risk for rapid community spread of the virus. Interactions throughout the community need to continue to maintain physical distancing strategies. With the increase in physical interactions, individuals and organizations must increase the focus on personal protection through hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and self-isolation with symptom onset. High risk individuals should continue to limit interactions to those that are considered vital.

At this step, the City of Joplin removes all occupancy restrictions for in-person worship but requires the continued application of physical distancing strategies for all places of worship. When possible, other operations of the church will continue to be conducted remotely and online. Such operations include but are not limited to administrative functions, meetings, bible studies, and other small groups. Additionally, Peace Lutheran Church will comply with the City of Joplin's twelve Phase 2 requirements for reopening places of worship as outlined above.

Within the context of Step 3, all other guidelines, practices, and rules outlined above continue to be applied except as noted below.

Holy Communion

If authorized by the Bishop's office and agreed mutually by Peace Lutheran's church council and covenant leader in consultation with the Bishop's office, Holy Communion may possibly resume at this step. Other possibilities for resuming Holy Communion are Step 4 of this phase or Phase 3.

When Holy Communion resumes, Peace Lutheran Church will follow these guidelines of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

- Those preparing and serving communion will sanitize their hands immediately before distributing communion; doing so in view of the congregation may help in reducing anxiety.
- During the Great Thanksgiving, the presiding minister may stand back from the table and not further touch the bread and cup.
- The assembly will refrain from kneeling or standing close together at a communion rail or in a line.
- Wafers will be used as a safer option during this time. A package of wafers can be emptied onto a paten with minimal touch. Bread requires more handling.
- Common cup and intinction will not be used.
- Initially, the practice of communion in one kind will be utilized. A chalice may also be filled with a minimal amount of wine, and communicants may reverence the cup while not partaking of the wine, still hearing the words "the blood of Christ, shed for you." If Holy Communion is authorized and permitted during Steps 3 and 4 of Phase 2, this is the practice that will be utilized. Communion servers will bring communion to each grouping of chairs while continuing to wear face masks. Face masks may be temporarily removed by communicants as they receive wafers.
- Later, in Phase 3, wine will be distributed in small glasses in trays while ensuring that the glasses are spaced far enough apart to minimize people's touching of other glasses.
- The use of pre-filled, disposable wine and wafer cups may appear to be convenient and safer but are not without risk; they are also challenging to open and may be cost-prohibitive.

Worship Leadership

- During Steps 3 and 4 of Phase 2, worship leaders may not need to wear masks if they are over six feet away from others. Leaders will still wear masks if they come into closer proximity with others.

Weddings and Funerals

- The church building may be used to conduct funerals or weddings at this step, but only for gatherings of fewer than 50 people. All other guidelines and rules outlined above must be followed.

Step 4: Expand mass gatherings

While not currently specified by the City of Joplin, transition to Step 4 is likely to coincide with a sustained community decrease in prevalence of COVID-19 cases for at least 56 days. Peace Lutheran will consider a similar threshold for the surrounding 11-county region.

Within this final step of Phase 2, the City of Joplin relaxes the maximum allowable attendance at mass gathering to 250 persons. Step 4 will be maintained until a transition to Phase 3 is achievable. High risk individuals should continue to limit interactions to those that are considered vital.

For Peace Lutheran Church, this means continued application of physical distancing strategies. When possible, other operations of the church will continue to be conducted remotely and online. Such operations include but are not limited to administrative functions, meetings, bible studies, and other small groups. Additionally, Peace Lutheran Church will comply with the City of Joplin's twelve Phase 2 requirements for reopening places of worship as outlined above.

Within the context of Step 4, all other guidelines, practices, and rules outlined above continue to be applied except as noted below.

Speaking, Singing, and Playing Instruments in Worship

- At the transition to Step 4, Peace Lutheran Church will evaluate current information and data regarding singing and communal speech during worship and revise its practices for such activity accordingly.

Adjusting the Response and Trigger for Phase 3: Giving Thanks and Helping Each Other to Eat and Drink in Meal-Fellowship

Peace Lutheran Church's transition to Phase 3 will be coordinated with the City of Joplin's similar transition. As with prior phases and steps, Peace Lutheran's church council and covenant leadership will cooperate with the Bishop's office in mutual decision making and authorization for the transition.

Peace Lutheran Church joins the City of Joplin in recognizing that the question of how quickly and effectively our community can reopen is directly related to the spread of COVID-19, which depends on the community's response as a whole.

When all rules and guidance in each step are followed, the likelihood for a more rapid reopening occurs. When rules or guidance are not followed, the reopening process is likely to take significantly longer. When the community has sustained a low level of COVID-19, allowing it to progress through the steps of Phase 2, there are three triggers that could prompt movement into Phase 3:

- availability of a vaccine
- widespread availability of effective treatment
- minimal active cases

In Phase 3, the City of Joplin will introduce long-term solutions to mitigate the spread of disease and lift all restrictions associated with COVID-19. More detailed plans and guidance from the City for transitioning into Phase 3 will be developed as the time nears. Likewise, Peace Lutheran Church will continue more detailed planning for gathering the assembly anew once this additional context and any related rules are known.