



St. Andrew's Lutheran Church

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Rev. Manuel Retamoza and Rev. Sarah Sumner-Eisenbraun, Pastors

September 9, 2020

Dear Members and Friends,

Many of you are aware that on Friday, August 28, 2020 state guidelines for COVID-19 restrictions on places of worship were changed for San Diego county. Churches are now allowed to hold inside worship for 25% of building capacity, or 100 people, whichever is less. For St. Andrew's it means we could have about 75 total people in worship, which includes pastors, musicians, and others who help with the worship service. Some of you have inquired about when St. Andrew's will be resuming in-person worship.

The short answer is **We Don't Know**. The longer answer is that re-opening is much more complex than simply opening the doors to 25% of our building capacity and requiring everyone wear masks. The Safe Reopening Team is developing a plan to be submitted to the congregation council, which will then evaluate and determine when it is safe and appropriate to reopen for in-person worship.

We thought you might be interested in knowing some of the requirements issued by the state, as well as potential associated costs in meeting and maintaining these requirements. What follows in this letter is by no means a comprehensive list. The state of California has issued a 14-page set of guidelines and protocols for places of worship. **We hope you understand that these requirements are meant to keep all of us as safe as possible until we have a vaccine and/or reliable treatment for COVID-19.**

We are required to have a written workplace plan that includes a person responsible for implementing the plan, a risk assessment and measures to be taken to prevent the spread of the virus, a process to investigate COVID cases and a process to check for compliance and a way to document and correct deficiencies.

Worker training is required, including education on preventing spread of the virus, self-screening steps, rules for when to stay home, when to seek medical attention, information on masks and physical distancing, and information on paid leave benefits available through state and federal agencies. "Workers" are pastors, office and lay staff and our preschool staff.

Anyone on the church campus is required to wear a mask. We are to provide masks to anyone who arrives without one and have a plan on how to deal with anyone who refuses to comply with this requirement. We also are to screen anyone arriving on campus for symptoms upon arrival and encourage the use of (and provide) hand sanitizer. This protocol requires us to find either a team of volunteers or assign these tasks to a staff member.

As you might expect, cleaning and disinfecting protocols are extensive. These protocols include:

- Thorough cleaning of high traffic areas
- Frequent disinfecting of commonly used surfaces
- Clean and sanitize shared equipment between each use (mics, podium, computer keyboards, musical instruments, etc.)
- Clean touchable surfaces between users (doors, light switches, chairs etc.)
- Using disposable or washable seat covers, and change or wash after each use (This is significant for us)
- Touch-free hand sanitizer at each entrance and contact area
- No hymnals or Bibles unless you bring your own. Bulletins could be placed on each seat ahead of time but cannot be handed out or picked up from a pile.
- If pastors wear robes and stoles, they will need to be laundered/cleaned after each service

- No passing of offering plates or other shared-touch items including communion cups.

Physical distancing guidelines are also extensive and include:

- Reconfiguring seating areas to allow for a minimum of 6 feet between congregants
- A reservation system to limit the number of people attending. This means people will have to make advance plans to attend, and if someone arrives who is not on the RSVP list, they will not be allowed to enter the building.
- No child-care or Sunday School. Family units must stay together during the service. (This means no wandering children in the service!)
- No shaking/holding hands, hugging, or other touching
- Reducing the number of restroom stalls available, and devising a plan for cleaning/sanitizing following each use, or following each service
- Installing signage to direct the flow of traffic and provide safety guidelines/reminders
- Reconfigure our entrances and exits to ensure one-way traffic patterns and no congregating

Additional considerations for places of worship include:

- No coffee/fellowship time on the courtyard (or anywhere else)
- No singing or group recitation (Lord's prayer, creed, responsive readings)
- Modification of communion practices to avoid possible spread of the virus. This means our circle around the altar, receiving bread and wine/juice from another person, and holding hands in the circle must all be discontinued. A new way of communing will have to be developed.

As has been true since the beginning of this pandemic, older adults and those with serious underlying medical conditions (especially heart or lung disease or diabetes) are at higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19. The CDC has released updated guidance for older adults. While we can't prevent anyone from deciding to attend worship, we do discourage anyone who fits this description from physically attending worship.

Meeting these protocols will require spending significant money on sanitation equipment and supplies, chair covers, disposable masks and possibly individually packaged communion elements, to name just a few things. Currently our offerings are not supporting our existing expenses so adding additional expenditures will require making some decisions on how to cover the new expenses.

We will have to recruit and train volunteers who will screen those attending worship, match attendees with the RSVP list, and deny entrance to anyone not on the RSVP list or who does not comply with mask and other sanitation and physical distancing protocols. We will also need volunteers to place seat covers before each service, and either dispose of or launder these covers after each use.

As you can see from reading this letter, in-person worship will be very different from what we were doing before the pandemic. Not being able to do many of the things that make our congregation welcoming and unique will be difficult. Safely re-opening will entail extensive work, costs, and the full support and participation of the entire congregation.

Currently, the requirements to safely reopen are both too costly and too cumbersome to be feasible at this juncture. The Safe Reopening Committee continues to monitor the situation and report its findings to the Council. We look forward to the time when we can safely re-open and will keep you updated on our findings.

In the interim, we welcome your suggestions, observations, and especially your prayers. Thank you for your continued support of our congregation's ministry.

Sincerely,

St. Andrew's Congregation Council

Holly Ferrante, President	Brian McMullen, Vice President
Lydia Dix, Secretary	Carol Sherry, Treasurer
Rick Bushore	Jeannine Eddy
Ryan Frisella	Ken Kozlik
Jillian McClellan	Jerry Selah
Damon Shaffer	Doug Thompson