

2021 Regathering Team Protocols

Following Christ's command to love our neighbor, the Regathering Team of Grace Lutheran, Raleigh makes the following recommendations to our congregational Council for gathering in-person for Church activities beginning August 29, 2021.

Alongside our Christian love of neighbor, our priorities as a congregation during the COVID-19 crisis continue to be:

The safety of our congregational members and wider community, especially the most vulnerable among us

The recommendations of local, state, and national health officials, and remaining in compliance with the ordinances of state government

The recommendations of the NC Synod and ELCA

Awareness of our liability and insurance issues

Setting a good example of faith, health, and safety to our neighbors.

We will begin gathering August 29th for worship in our Sanctuary and will gather in-person for activities on a continuing basis thereafter – some indoor, some outdoor. The Pastor, Council and Task Force must remain vigilant about observing and understanding data trends and medical advice and so therefore, must remain *flexible* about all gathering dates. If we are truly committed to the health and safety of the congregation, then we must adapt to changing realities regarding the virus.

When we decide to gather indoors, the following protocols must be communicated clearly to the congregation and visitors, and followed:

- Masks must be worn when inside the church building when the congregation gathers for worship until further notice. Grace will have masks available at no charge. Children ages 2 and under are not required to wear masks, as per the most recent CDC recommendations.
- Sanctuary chairs can be marked for social distancing. While families living in the same dwelling (or social pod/cohort) may sit together, all others must maintain social distance in accordance with current guidance. Alternate rows should be used for the two Sunday services, to avoid extra cleaning needs.
- Sanitizing stations must be in place at each entrance and in other strategic locations. Hand sanitizer or comparable wash must be supplied.
- Air must be circulated in gathering spaces through the HVAC system before, during, and after any gathering. System outside air intakes should be opened as the system allows.

- Any windows and doors that can be left open for better air circulation should be.
- Multiple exits and entrances must be made available.
- Dismissal will be assigned by ushers to avoid crowding near exits.
- Services will be livestreamed on social media and our website.
- Services will still be recorded and be made available to all who choose not to attend.
- A screen shot(s) will be taken of the congregation from the front of the Sanctuary during the sermon to make a record of attendance and seat position for contact tracing purposes.
- Singing by choir and congregation will be handled carefully by worship leaders, who will wait until it is safe to do so.
- Lingering in the church building after worship will be discouraged, and the congregation will be encouraged to move outdoors after worship has ended.
- Thorough cleaning and disinfecting should take place between services of high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, handles, microphones, and faucets. Clorox or Lysol wipes can be used for this purpose.
- Offering envelopes may be left in receptacles near the exits.
- Bulletins will be available at each row and must be taken with each worshipper when leaving the worship space.
- Communion Elements will be available at each row and must be taken with each worshiper when leaving the worship space.
- In-person attendance at our Sunday worship will be discouraged for members, friends, and family who are experiencing any COVID symptoms, who are high-risk for complications from infection or high-risk for transmission of infection, or who have been exposed to the Coronavirus in any way. Participation in our virtual service will be encouraged for these and all who are uncomfortable with worshipping in the Sanctuary.

We need to also keep in mind:

Our worship style will be different than past “normal” worship, gradually returning to ‘normal.’ It may seem disappointing to those expecting worship as it was at first. We will limit singing, personal contact, call-and-response liturgical dialogue, and Sacraments.

We will have to turn away or lovingly dismiss anyone not in compliance with set protocols.

Grace may need to recruit volunteers from the congregation to help to clean and sanitize the Sanctuary and restrooms.

We will seek guidance about quarantine policies in the event that someone who attended services tests positive for COVID-19.

Ushers will need to be trained extensively on protocols, seating, distancing, sanitizing, and dismissal. Please listen to any instructions they give and follow their directions.

Pastor and other worship leaders will likely remove their masks while speaking, reading, or praying for clarity. The congregation is asked to please keep their masks on for the duration of the worship service, at least until they are outside.

All members, and our families and friends, are encouraged to pray daily for our congregation, leadership, local, state, and federal officials, health organizations, and front-line workers.

Weddings: When we are worshipping in our Sanctuary, weddings will be allowed with the above protocols, appropriate distancing, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), and cleaning.

Funerals: When we are worshipping in our Sanctuary, funerals will be allowed with the above protocols, appropriate distancing, PPE, and cleaning.

Youth: Our Youth Group(s) will always follow state and CDC guidelines for all gatherings.

Outreach ministries: All ministries must obey all local, state, and federal mandates about food preparation, distancing, gathered group size, and PPE.

Sunday School /Confirmation: Once we are worshipping in the Sanctuary, Sunday School, Confirmation, and other educational opportunities are welcome to gather with proper PPE, distancing, and cleaning.

Fellowship events: All events must follow State and CDC guidelines for safety.

Having faith that God works in many ways – some mysterious and some obvious – this document and its stated protocols in their final form were unanimously approved by the Grace Council on August 10th, 2021.