

7.24.20 - Updated - New Life Church of Foley – Covid Preparedness Plan

Covid Preparedness Plan Purpose: Governor Walz has declared that churches in Minnesota can once again convene. Having a plan is a part of reconvening which is recommended by the State, our District Council, and the CDC. This plan is intended to be a practical and sensible way for New Life Church to gather once again in one place to worship our Lord and Savior as He commands us to do.

Being a Christian involves intellectual reasoning as well as acceptance of religious mores and traditions which do not contradict scriptures. This plan and the information contained in it have been prayed over and discussed by multiple levels of our leadership team. We appreciate those of you who were able to return the survey which helped guide us in our plan. Outside resourcing has been from a pastoral group of multi-sized churches in our state, our MN District Council of the Assemblies of God, our National Headquarters of the Assemblies of God, the CDC, the MN Department of Health, health professionals and local professionals.

Considerations: Meeting together is essential and biblical for us. The pivot for the church to go online due to the Covid-19 virus has certainly resulted in a broader audience. It has also made services availability for some who might not be able to attend in person. It has pushed us to become more excellent with our online presentation. Nonetheless we attempt to be the church of Hebrews 10:24. Here we are admonished to meet together as a church body physically. When we do it encourages us to love, do good works, build each other up and it provides an accountability from sin especially as we approach Jesus return. Additionally, it brings into account the commands to worship, pray, give and study together which brings a special presence of God to the equation. See Matthew 18:20.

So what do we do when the authorities limit, restrict or deny our opportunity to meet together? Paul tells us in Romans 13:1-3 to obey the governing authorities, whether Christian or secular. Nevertheless, there are times when commands from authorities conflict with other commands from God's word. That causes us to step into the process of discernment characterized by Philippians 2:12 which tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. When we respond to what God commands in conflict with the state, we can expect to suffer consequences for placing faith over civil authority. I encourage you to read about the underground church around the world or the examples throughout the bible.

Guidelines: Our choice to meet together has been bathed with considerable thought, planning and prayer. We do not return in an act of rebellion or disobedience, but one of being guided by the Holy Spirit. As such, we are setting some guidelines to help mitigate some risk of spreading or contracting this virus. We encourage anyone who is uncomfortable attending, who is in a high-risk group, or who is feeling ill to stay home and enjoy the online streaming service.

Our desire is to continue to adapt when circumstances change, or when new credible information becomes available. Experts appear to agree that this virus will infect most people and so mitigation efforts are not to stop the virus from infecting people, but to slow the rate of infections and deaths and keep hospitals available for the sick. The death rate and ICU numbers have been mitigated through July throughout the state as a whole.

CDC Statement: We are giving general considerations to help guide, but communities of faith will need to discern how to best practice their beliefs in conjunction with safety guidelines. Millions of American embrace worship as an essential part of life. For many, gathering for worship is at the heart of what it

means to be a community of faith. These gatherings do present a risk of spreading Covid-19. In consideration of the faith traditions, suggestions are given, and their implementation should be guided by what is feasible, practical, acceptable, and tailored to the specific needs and traditions of each community of faith. Any information or recommendations given by the CDC is a non-binding form of guidance for consideration only, not meant to regulate or prescribe standards for faith communities in houses of worship.

New Life Return to Worship

We know and understand that each person has their own sources of information, practices which they feel are important and opinions about which practice they feel are best. Regardless of where you fall, please practice love and unity in this season of political agendas and polarization. If uncomfortable with our plan, please enjoy the services with our live stream option. We love you whether here in person or joining us via live-stream.

As a leadership team we refuse to pit emotional arguments against one another, it is not productive, nor is it biblical. For instance, here is one I have heard, “you are selfish and don’t love others unless you wear a mask” pitted against “you don’t have faith if you do wear a mask.” Both of those statements are false, antagonizing and a trick of the enemy to bring about division and judgement. Masks are worn or not worn for a wide variety of reasons. We ask that you follow the biblical mandate to love others and not judge them in how they choose to address or respond to this virus. In the church we ask you to love the church and its leadership by respecting the church established guidelines.

Updated Order 20-81

This update is in anticipation of the broad spectrum of responses to the Governor’s latest executive order 20-81. This order mandates wearing masks indoors throughout the state, including churches starting July 25, 2020. With the potential for conflict over this issue, Paul reminds us of one higher purpose for the church.

1 Corinthians 1:10 *“I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.”*

There is no question in what we read and hear, the pandemic has become politicized and is polarizing. That is unfortunate because the health concerns are real. Regardless of where you fall, do not let the enemy have a foothold in your heart or our church. According to scripture, Jesus is our ultimate authority and the day is coming when the church will have to take a stand against unbiblical mandates by the governing authorities. When that happens, this verse and others will become even more important. But we do not see wearing or not wearing masks as an issue of biblical truth.

Personally, we do not enjoy wearing masks and feel it should be a personal decision. We know many of you feel similarly. However, there are times we do things we may not like to do, and we believe this is one of those times. It comes down to a simple question: Are we willing to put aside personal feelings about masks for a higher purpose? One biblical mandate is to gather in fellowship. (see Hebrews 10:24) If wearing a mask eliminates potential conflict regarding obedience to the truth, isn’t it a minor inconvenience? However, if wearing a mask while attending church is irreconcilable for you, please join us via our online stream on Facebook and YouTube.

We see Executive Order 20-81 impacting our worship services in these ways while in the church building:

1. Attendees 18 and over, including staff and volunteers, are required to wear a mask upon entering the church.
2. Children under age two should not wear masks.
3. It is recommended, but not required, that children ages two to five wear masks.
4. Children under age 18, not sitting with parents in the sanctuary, do not need to wear a mask.
4. Masks are NOT required on the stage when speaking or leading worship.
5. Masks are NOT required for those with physical, medical, mental health, difficulty breathing or any other health issues complicated by wearing a mask.

We pivoted in many ways during this pandemic, but please remember, Jesus is our message and our passion for a lost and dying world. It will take a lot more than wearing a mask to discourage us or stop us from worshipping Him together and sharing His hope with others. The virus will pass, how the church responds will be remembered.

New Life COVID-19 Ministry Practices

Social Distancing, Masks and Hand Sanitizer:

It is recommended that people who are not from the same family social distance at 6 feet. If 6 feet of separation is not possible, masks are recommended by the CDC. We will not be requiring masks of our volunteers or for anyone to attend our services. We will have masks available if you want one and have forgotten to bring one. We will have hand sanitizer available to use upon entrance to the building and in other areas of the building. We encourage their use.

Sanctuary Protocol:

We ask that upon arrival, any fellowship which might occur happens outside the building, with appropriate social distancing. Please make your way into the building at 9:45 to be seated in time for service. Some of you may want to arrive earlier to get a front row seat and spend some time in prayer.

We will leave every other row empty and recommend seats remain empty between non-family or same household units. This creates social distancing. We will only be using the front doors of the sanctuary for entrance. Please do not use the side doors of the sanctuary for entrance. Ushers will guide you in seating as needed.

Online giving is encouraged. We will have an offering basket available in the foyer to give upon entering or exiting the sanctuary.

Upon completion of the service you are dismissed to leave out any door while maintaining social distancing.

Children:

We will be providing full children's ministry. Please understand that with children social distancing is complex. We are placing the children into the following groups and areas.

Birth-Toddlers will be in the Toddler room.

3 Year old's-Kindergarten will be in the preschool rooms. We will open the middle divider in that room to provide a larger space for social distancing.

1st grade-6th grade will be in Life Hall. Chairs will be set up in groups for siblings to be able to sit together and for social distancing.

Any snacks will be individualized. We will be utilizing the church playground. If you are uncomfortable leaving your children in a ministry area, they are welcome in the sanctuary with you. Please bring something for them to play with if necessary.

Doors, coffee, drinking fountain, signs:

We will be propping doors open, outside coffee serving and coffee shop orders begin on 7.19.10. We will be taping off the drinking fountain and posting signs as necessary. Please help us with this. You are welcome to bring a cup of coffee into the service if you desire.

Healthy Hygiene:

Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

Cover coughs and sneezes

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands

Maintain social distance of 6 feet whenever possible

Stay home if feeling ill

Cleaning and Sanitizing:

If you are available to help us with cleaning and sanitizing please let Pastor Pam know at pam@newlifefoley.com

We will be sanitizing door handles and hand touch points. Garbage will be emptied and bathrooms cleaned. Research letters from the New England Journal of Medicine shows the "half-life" of the virus on plastic to be up to 8 hours. Research letters published in the Microbe showed the virus detectable on stainless steel for up to 4 days. As a result, we will allow our building to "rest" for 5 days in those areas used for Sunday mornings. Our offices will continue to be sanitized daily and remain open during the week. Children's ministry areas will continue to be sanitized after use as is currently done.

Online Stream:

Our online stream will continue, and we encourage you to take advantage of it if you are unable to attend worship in person. Our heart is that for anyone is uncomfortable, unhealthy or at risk to provide an opportunity to stay connected with the direction we are going to reach our surrounding area with the gospel and the love of Jesus.