

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Policy Area: Facilities

Subject: Safety

Revised: May 22, 2021



Infectious Diseases Policy – Version 1.7

“...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” – 2 Timothy 1:7

Gloria Dei desires to meet the spiritual needs of everyone who comes to church seeking worship, fellowship, and spiritual growth. While everyone is welcome, there are necessary precautions established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to minimize the risk of spreading communicable diseases.

Policy Context

This revision to our February 9 policy was prompted by two important announcements:

- 1) On May 13, the CDC announced that fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting except where required by other laws, rules, and regulations. This announcement was driven by two key medical findings:
 - a. Few vaccinated people become infected with the virus and transmission seems rarer still
 - b. The vaccines appear to be effective against all known variants of the coronavirus
- 2) On May 20, Governor Reynolds signed a bill into law that immediately made it illegal to require masks in schools. It also prevents cities and counties from having mask mandates that affect private property.

Beginning with the May 15 weekend, we announced that all of our worship services would be “mask optional.” While we continue to encourage the wearing of masks, particularly by those who have not been vaccinated, we wanted to provide additional flexibility in light of the CDC’s latest guidance. We also removed signage in our worship spaces, which intentionally helped people to socially distance, and instead we now simply ask people to respect the space of others in worship.

Per Governor Reynolds’ latest proclamation, children attending Children’s Church this summer will not need to be masked, although they may wear a mask if they/their parent(s) feel more comfortable doing so. Per CDC guidance, vaccinated adult volunteers will not need to wear a mask but we continue to encourage masks for those who have not been vaccinated. The same guidelines will be in place for youth events and activities.

We intend to open our nursery in June for the 9AM worship service on Sunday morning. In order to remain consistent, adult and teen leaders who have been vaccinated will not need to wear a mask unless they choose to do so, while we encourage non-vaccinated staff to continuing wearing a mask. The children, ages 3 and under, will not be masked.

Worship Precautions

In addition to the standard precautions, we have implemented the following precautions in order to prevent/slow the spread of communicable diseases, in particular, the coronavirus:

1. If you are ill, please stay home. You should not come to church until you are fever free for at least 24 hours without the help of fever-reducing medications. Many services and studies are available via livestream or recorded and posted on our website later. Per Iowa Department of Health guidelines, we cannot allow entry to anyone who is visibly ill or who has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days unless you have been vaccinated.
2. Social distancing practices remain an effective way for non-vaccinated people to limit the risk of infecting others or becoming infected themselves.
3. Hand sanitizer is available throughout the building on the walls via touchless dispensers or in pump bottles. Our sanitizer contains 70% alcohol, which is within CDC guidelines. Our bathroom soap is anti-bacterial. We recommend either washing hands or using sanitizer upon entering our facility.
4. We have reduced our sanitizing practices in our worship spaces as the risk of transmission via touch has been shown to be negligible. We will continue to sanitize tables after usage, as well as high touch areas and the nursery after each use in June.
5. All individuals involved in food preparation and service will begin by thoroughly washing their hands. This includes worship assistants.
6. We are transitioning back toward normal communion practices while still offering prepackaged bread and wine. We expect the transition to be completed in the coming weeks.

Member and Visitor Precautions

We recommend, along with many others, that you personally *can* and *should* take simple preventive measures, as recommended by health officials:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, including your cell phone, using a regular household cleaning spray and wipe
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue. Immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- These tips are essential for every individual and particularly those in the highest-risk groups, i.e. adults over the age of 70 or those with pre-existing health conditions.

Weddings

Gloria Dei is a popular site for weddings and we want to be able to continue to host these celebrations in a safe and helpful way. The following guidelines will ensure that we can do that:

- Any social gathering/attendance limitations, guidelines or directives from the CDC or Governor must be strictly adhered to in the sanctuary/worship space.
- Guests are encouraged to wear masks if they are not vaccinated. The wedding couple is welcome to require all guests wear a mask. We continue to encourage separate households to socially distance.
- The wedding party, including the bride and groom, are not required to wear masks.
- Due to social distancing requirements and potential attendance limitations, we have the ability to livestream the wedding ceremony so others may view it remotely. If this option is desired by the wedding couple, the Worship Department will make the decision regarding its feasibility.
- We continue to advise that wedding programs be shown on the screens rather than in paper bulletins.
- We will consider wedding reception requests on a case-by-case basis.

Funerals

Funerals for our members are a difficult situation regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Funerals due to COVID-19 are far worse, and are perhaps, the saddest and most difficult part of this pandemic. People are often isolated from their hospitalized loved ones and do not have the ability to say goodbye as they die. Further complicating the situation, is the possibility that the remaining spouse and children may have been exposed and are now carriers with the likelihood of being contagious. This presents a unique problem for burials “from the church” as we call funerals. As such, we are putting the following guidelines in place:

- Any loved ones who may have been exposed to the deceased must test negative for the virus or be vaccinated before being allowed to attend the funeral. If the loved one exposed or infected is immediate family, then the funeral itself must be postponed until that loved one tests negative or has been vaccinated.
- Any social gathering/attendance limitations, guidelines or directives from the CDC or Governor must be strictly adhered to in the sanctuary/worship space.
- Guests are encouraged to wear masks if they are not vaccinated. We continue to encourage separate households to socially distance.
- We are not currently requiring registrations for funeral attendees. If we believe a funeral may be very well attended, we reserve the right to make an exception.
- While we encourage families to make their funeral a complete worship service, musicians, technology assistants, volunteers, and employees, should be kept to the absolute minimum to accomplish that goal. Furthermore, the service itself should be reasonably limited in length.
- We continue to advise that funeral programs be shown on the screens rather than in paper bulletins. The staff at Gloria Dei can transpose the “on screen” service to paper bulletins with keepsake covers for the family to have and hand out afterward.

- We will consider funeral reception requests on a case-by-case basis.

Other Events/Activities

We are once again allowing usage of our facility by members and outside groups. Guidelines include:

- Maximum occupancy of ten individuals in a single classroom. We encourage non-vaccinated individuals to wear masks and for everyone to pursue social distancing. If there is unanimous consent within a group to not wear masks then that group may proceed in that manner.
- Individuals belonging to outside groups are encouraged to wear masks if they have not been vaccinated. If any member of the group chooses to not wear a mask, they assume the risk and liability of such action. Again, social distancing practices should be followed.
- We ask individuals to be mindful of their surroundings and to keep as clean of an environment as possible.

Privacy

- The church is sensitive to privacy interests and will share health information on a “need to know” basis. The church will also comply with any federal, state, or local law that requires reporting of health information to regulatory authorities and will otherwise release information as required by law.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” – John 14:27