

We are Better Together
A Plan to Safely and Purposefully Join Together
Adopted: May 26, 2020 | Emanuel's Lutheran Church
Council Updated: March 8, 2022

The protocols outlined in this plan regarding worship, small group ministries, or any on-campus gathering are expected to be flexible. The protocols are established based on the positivity rates of Guadalupe, per the CDC COVID Data Tracker, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view?list_select_state=Texas&data-type=Risk&list_select_county=48187, and the safety recommendations given by the City of Seguin, the Guadalupe County Emergency District, Texas Lutheran University's COVID Task Force, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). These organizations have been instrumental in helping us determine safe and effective gathering protocols. Keep in mind that **all at risk* demographics** are encouraged to refrain from **any** on-campus activities, worship services, or ministry groups.

Schedule of Changes:

Emanuel's Church Council adopts the following updated practices and protocols for worship, fellowship activities, small group ministries, outside rentals, volunteers and staff, and ministry partners effective Sunday, March 13, 2022, and following:

- Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required while participating in campus events, which would include those gathering for worship, Bible study, Sunday School, small groups, outside rentals, service groups, etc.
 - Individuals, staff, teachers, volunteers, or visitors, who choose to continue to wear a mask will be supported in their choice. It is a great expression of our Christian faith to ask these individuals if they would like a mask worn while you are ministering to them, working alongside them, or sitting in their office. Please respect their preferences as we do not always know an individual's personal health situation.
 - Masks will continue to be made available in the Narthex and the Church Office for those who would like to use them or need them.
- Pews currently marked off will be opened to accommodate more seating in the sanctuary and those seated in classrooms or other gathering spaces are invited to sit closer than 6-foot part. Please be mindful of the needs of those around you and support the needs and choices of those who may wish to have more space around them.
- Worship practices such as "Sharing of the Peace," collecting of the offering by passing the offering plates, and kneeling at the rails for Holy Communion, will continually be added back into our worship services leading up to Easter 2022. As space and time our services permits, some of these practices may be modified.
- Fellowship gatherings and small group gatherings that include food and beverages may use self-serve lines as applicable. The pre-plating of food or pre-pouring of drinks is no longer required, but gloves must be worn by those handling any drink or food that is being served.

- Remember that the health and wellbeing of everyone participating in each event is paramount to the ongoing wellbeing of our church, its ministries, and its ability to serve our neighbors. The highest etiquette for personal hygiene, including the washing of hands for at least 20 seconds, the using hand sanitizer, and staying home when not feeling well, must be followed.

Expectations of the Congregation:

With the above outline set out, the following guidelines are being implemented as a safe and purposeful way to be together in ministry. These guidelines will apply to all ministry groups, rental groups, building tenants, Bible study groups, and congregation members **until further notice** from the Church Council. Remember, we are first and foremost a church, a place of grace, hope, and love lived and shared. We show these characteristics of our Christian faith by always placing others before ourselves. The wearing of our masks, the giving of a little extra space, and the monitoring of our own health symptoms, even if we are not in the midst of a pandemic, are the tangible ways of being Christ in the world; of loving our neighbor. As we live into these new ways of being church together, be mindful of how you can care better for those around you and be willing to take an extra step so that they too feel at ease and welcome.

Worship Times: Worship will be held inside the sanctuary at 10:30am. Our worship practices will return to pre-pandemic rhythms that include the following activities and learning from our journey through the pandemic:

1. Holy Communion will be offered in three ways for those wishing to commune in person:
 - a. First, there will be two continuous or kneeling lines offering the bread wafers and the wine or juice. Congregants will be invited by the ushers to come forward, pew by pew, to receive the elements. Gluten free wafers are made available upon request. A wafer will be dropped into the hands of each person, who will then step to the next station where they will select an empty glass or a glass filled with juice from the communion tray, then step to the last and final station where their empty glass will be filled with wine and where they may consume the wine or juice and dispose of the glass in the silver bowls at the ends of the first pews. When the kneeling rails are being used, congregants will be brought the elements of Communion and asked to place their used cup on the small, wooden shelf on the kneeler. Congregants are encouraged to be mindful of physical distance between themselves and others as they participate in Communion and offer space, as needed, to those who need to physically distance more. Communion Assistants will follow the highest etiquette for personal hygiene, including the washing of hands for at least 20 seconds, the using hand sanitizer, and staying home when not feeling well.
 - b. Second, there are prefilled Communion cups, both regular and gluten free, available on the table as you enter the Narthex. Those wishing to not walk to the front for Communion or have Communion brought to them, may partake in Communion by these cups. As the congregation begins to sing the Communion Song or hymn, congregants are invited to open their cup and wafer and take the elements. Congregants are asked to dispose of their cups as they exit the sanctuary.
 - c. Third, for those congregants unable to walk to the front of the sanctuary, ushers will inform one of the pastors or one of the other Communion Assistants, of where those congregants are seated, and Communion will be brought to them personally.
2. "Sharing of the Peace" will resume as a worship practice, for those who wish to move around the sanctuary. Congregants are strongly encouraged to sanitize their hands before and after this time of fellowship, for both their personal and our communal wellbeing. Please be mindful of

those not wishing to shake hands or receive hugs and share the peace with them through a distanced wave, “peace” sign, or another such sign of hope and joy.

3. Offering baskets will resume their passing paths throughout the sanctuary during the “Offering Hymn” and then processed to the altar in preparation for Holy Communion. An empty basket will be placed on the table in the Narthex for congregants who need to leave anything additional as they exit the sanctuary. Blue cards are also placed into these baskets, either during their passing or at the end of the service. Online options for giving are also available in each weekly bulletin and via our church’s website, www.emanuellsutheranchurch.com.
4. The service will continue to be broadcast at 10:30am via KWED AM 1580 as it has been and will be live streamed on Emanuel’s YouTube channel. All bulletins and worship materials will also be available online for each weekly service, including special services as applicable, via our church’s website, www.emanuellsutheranchurch.com and through our weekly newsletter.

The Church Council and staff will remain attentive to local health department and state regulations, as well as CDC guidelines regarding worshipping communities, gathering groups, and any changes in COVID19 positivity rates in our city and county that would require changes to our gathering practices.

Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required.

Sanctuary Seating: Pews will be opened to accommodate more seating in the sanctuary. Please be mindful of the needs of those around you and support the needs and choices of those who may wish to have more space around them. The chapel and choir transept seating will be kept for additional chairs or spaces for wheelchairs and be the best area for seating for those who have different mobility needs. These areas are also available to anyone who wishes to remain spread out. The nursery, for those preschool aged to kindergarten, will be open for those who wish to use this staffed and monitored space during worship. The “Pray Ground” will gradually reopen over the weeks leading up to Easter 2022.

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Choirs (Overall Music): Singing is one of the greatest blessings of our worshipping community. All congregants participating in campus events, especially those who are singing worship leaders, are invited to sing and participate in worship without their mask. Singing, per national research provided by the National Association of Teachers of Singing, is one of the greatest ways to spread a virus. Our Handbell Choir and Vocal Choir, as well as guitarists, instrumentalists, and others who can help us diversify how we encounter the music of worship, will continue to be very important to this time of sharing in the worship leadership.

Post-Service Fellowship: The fellowship time for coffee and snack, following worship, will continue. Those serving during these fellowship time must always wear gloves while handling any food or drink. Congregants are invited to serve themselves, however, serving utensils must be used when retrieving food items from common plates. The highest etiquette for personal hygiene, including the washing of hands for at least 20 seconds, the using hand sanitizer, and staying home when not feeling well, must be followed. **Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required.**

Ushers: Guiding people to their seats, making sure we are mindful of those wishing to have additional space around them, and aiding in the cleaning and preparing of the worship space for each service will be the vital work of each of our usher teams. Ushers need to be present for worship no less than 45 minutes prior to worship. This will allow ample time to prepare the sanctuary for worship and to check in with the pastors for any additional changes or updates. During Communion, Ushers will welcome congregants, pew-by-pew, to receive the sacrament. An Usher Checklist is available on the cabinet doors of the usher closet in the Narthex with detailed instructions for our practices and protocols during worship. The watchful and supportive eyes of these volunteers will be called upon even more at this

time to make sure our house of worship is safe, open, and welcoming to all. At the close of worship, Ushers will make sure the sanctuary is clean and prepared for the next scheduled worship service or event. **Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required.**

Sunday School (Bible Studies): Faith Formation in the church is a vital part of our shared ministry together. Being responsible with how we gather will be paramount for the continued safety and health of our church. All groups who gather for Sunday School must follow the outlined protocols above regarding mask wearing and physical distancing. The serving of food and drinks during a class session is allowed but must follow the outlined guidance given in the “post-service fellowship” paragraph. Any surface used, including but not limited to, tables, counter tops, etc., need to be cleaned at the end of each meeting/gathering. **Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required.**

Ministry Groups (Quick Quilters, Ladies Aid, Property Stewards, etc.): Ministry groups are invited to fully resume their weekly and monthly activities while adhering to the outlined protocols above regarding mask wearing and maintaining 6 -feet of physical distance. The serving of food and drinks during a ministry group gathering is allowed but must follow the outlined guidance given in the “post-service fellowship” paragraph. Any surface used, including, but not limited to, tables, counter tops, etc., need to be cleaned at the end of each meeting/gathering. Please make sure to schedule any additional room needs or group needs in advance so that the Church Office can make sure we are staying safe as a gathering community. **Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required.**

Office Visitors: Our church office is certainly one of the heartbeats of our ministry during the week. It will be the best use of your time and extremely helpful for our staff if appointments with staff are made prior to visiting. Some of our offices are small and might require the use of a different space for our conversations if a staff member, or those who are gathering, request. Please remain in the lobby until a staff member comes to you and welcomes you into their office. Staff members or visitors who choose to continue to wear a mask will be supported in their choice. It is a great expression of our Christian faith to ask these individuals if they would like a mask worn while you are sitting in their office. Please respect their preferences as we do not always know an individual’s personal health situation. **Masks are strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status, but no longer required.**

Day School Chapel: Chapel is scheduled to take place every Wednesday at 10:15am.

**All ELC members who are at risk, per the CDC guidelines and definitions, meaning: those 65 years of age and older or those with chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, chronic heart disease, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, liver disease or weakened immune system are strongly encouraged to mask regardless of vaccination status and to maintain safe physical distance while in group settings at this time.*