

Seward & Moose Pass UMC

Reimagining Life Together Plan

Version -- July 1, 2020

This July 1 version was approved by Superintendent Carlo Rapanut on July 2, 2020 with the following caveats:

- 1) As we move through the phases, our plan shifts with the ever-evolving science of mitigation and the plan is updated to reflect these changes. (We need to have an understanding of how we clean and keep people safe and have that expressed clearly)
- 2) We are clear about the expectations for the preschool as their direction comes into focus later in the summer and reflect that in our plans.
- 3) Approval, for now, is only for moving into "Phase 2" (which means outside worship and gathering).
- 4)

Preliminary Preparations & Plans

Ministry in Phase 2 (of the *Reimagining Life Together* document) with an emphasis on In-Person Fellowship & Gatherings and Solo Music recording in our churches.

Ministry in Phase 3 with a framework for restarting in-person worship in our sanctuary spaces.

Ministry in Phase 4 (which is a long way away from our present environment)

INTRODUCTION

We aim to follow John Wesley's *Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm. Do Good. Stay in Love with God.* We understand that the threat of COVID-19 has meant the cessation of in-person worship for the time being as we try to "Do No Harm." COVID-19 is spread through airborne droplets and infection is dependent upon level of exposure along with time exposed. Sitting next to others, in enclosed spaces, singing, and even talking, carries a large risk of infection from both those who have symptoms and those who are not symptomatic. In short, our regular method of gathering for worship (sitting together, singing, hugging, holding hands, eating together, passing offering plates, dipping bread into juice for communion) can cause "harm" in our present environment.

We need to carefully determine how we will gather safely, all the while providing the necessary pastoral care and worship experience for those who will not be gathering at any time in the near future. And we need to continue talking about our plans in leadership meetings and

worship services, addressing fears, and listening to our denominational leaders and our health experts throughout this process.

We know there are small groups at both Seward and Moose Pass UMCs who may want to gather again, even with social distancing restrictions, building use restrictions, and singing restrictions.

We acknowledge that some persons are at a higher risk and more vulnerable to this virus due to age or pre-existing conditions and we encourage all to protect themselves. We also acknowledge that beginning to open can put pressure on worship leaders, musicians, and regular attendees to gather even though they may be at a higher risk. Every effort must be made to encourage the most vulnerable – even key leaders – to protect themselves. This is an act of love.

Since we know that the best way to avoid spreading the virus is to practice physical distancing while covering our mouths and noses with cloth face masks, all gatherings (through Phase 3) will abide by physical distancing, face masks, and keeping a record of all persons who attend events for potential contact tracing if required.

During Phase 1, group activity in our churches has ceased. The church doors have been closed except for office staff. All worship and fellowship has been online through Facebook, ZOOM meetings & Zoom Fellowship. Pastoral care has been provided via phone and electronic means. Our mission trip to Nome Community UMC has been cancelled.

As of June 16, 2020 churches in the Greater Northwest Area are allowed to enter Phase 2 with a plan approved by the Superintendent and meeting health guidelines.

As of Sunday, June 28 there is a spike in COVID-19 cases in Seward. While we may think about gathering outside for worship at some point, we are not eager to get back into our church buildings too quickly.

We do not have a set timeline for gathering in-person again. There is no set “date” in this plan. This plan gives us the framework for entering Phase 2 when the Superintendent approves the plan and the congregations are ready.

PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS DURING PHASE 1

- 300 face masks have been acquired for all members and friends to have one while providing extras for visitors (although we anticipate exceptionally few visitors in the near future)
- Cleaning wipes have been acquired
- There is ample hand sanitizer for both churches

- Plans are being made to continue an online worship experience into the future
- Signs reminding individuals of social distancing, mask-wearing, alternative greetings, are being printed.
- The congregations have been informed that worship will “look different” going forward: face masks required, no communion, social distancing, no singing, an online component for those who should not (or choose not) to gather.
- Buildings will be prepared for potential use when they can be opened for indoor worship: Pews moved 6 feet apart in Seward, pews blocked off in Moose Pass, signage to limit bathrooms to one person, closing of the Seward UMC nursery and classroom, hymnals removed and not to be used until Phase 4.
- Cleaning regimen after use will be posted.
- Sinks and drinking fountain are being assessed by local plumber.
- We have started collecting hardware and software for worship production. As of Phase 1, worship recording occurs in our churches. We anticipate continuing with that in Phase 2, but with the addition of being able to record one person/family singing. For Phases 3 and beyond we anticipate a mixture of prerecorded and live components to worship, with the service available online (either streamed live or uploaded to be viewed later).

MINISTRY IN PHASE 2

Small Outdoor Fellowship Gatherings

1. There is a “sweet, sweet Spirit” when the Body of Christ comes together for mutual support and fellowship. This is a time for people to meet (masked) face to (masked) face; to see each other NOT on a screen but in person.
2. These gatherings have the following requirements:
 - a. The pastor shall be notified and will need to grant permission (in writing or via email) for each fellowship event meeting as a ministry of Seward or Moose Pass UMC. (In case someone gets sick, we need to know that the church did what they could to protect members and friends and the larger community.)
 - b. If you or a household member is sick, STAY HOME.
 - c. “Outdoor Gatherings,” as the name implies, is “Outdoors.” The point is to keep churches, homes, or businesses free of the coronavirus. Participants should keep out of the church or home they are meeting at.
 - d. Attendees should bring their own chair(s) or stay in their own cars (for a drive-in fellowship)
 - e. Cloth face coverings are required for anyone attending. Fresh masks may be provided to those who don’t have one.
 - f. Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals/families/cars.
 - g. Limit gathering size to one that can accommodate the 6 feet distancing...no more than 15 in a gathering. This is stricter than Anchorage requirements, but we want to keep everyone safe. Anyone pushing the number attending over 15 must be turned away.

- h. Using an invite/RSVP system can help ensure groups of fifteen or fewer and is highly recommended.
- i. For now, there should be no singing (We hope this will change as we learn more about the virus from public health authorities but it's not looking like this will change anytime soon.)
- j. It is required to bring your own hand sanitizer and use it.
- k. Eating is okay if you: bring your own food, have hand sanitizer/disinfecting wipes, use single-use utensils and easy to handle food.
- l. There will be no serving of Holy Communion.
- m. If you are meeting at one of our churches, you are not to use the bathroom (remember that part about keeping our buildings free of the Coronavirus).
- n. The pastor will be notified (in writing or email) after the completion of the event, with a list of those in attendance and a brief assertion that the requirements for social distancing were met. Attendance is important for potential contact-tracing in case of COVID-19.

Small Outdoor Worship Experiences

- 1. There is a "sweet, sweet Spirit" when the Body of Christ comes together for mutual support and fellowship. This is a time for people to meet (masked) face to (masked) face; to see each other NOT on a screen but in person.
- 2. The model here is "an outdoor house church." Because of how coronavirus spreads, we know that there is less chance of infection if we are outdoors and in small groups, even with all of the social distancing. If people appreciate this model, it is something that could work long-term. The pastor could "circuit ride" from house-church setting to house-church setting. However, the congregations have shown an ability to lead worship on their own in absence of the pastor and could facilitate worship with prerecorded or prepared material from the pastor.
- 3. These gatherings have the following requirements:
 - a. The pastor shall be notified and will need to grant permission (in writing or via email) for each fellowship event meeting as a ministry of Seward or Moose Pass UMC. (In case someone gets sick, we need to know that the church did what they could to protect members and friends and the larger community.)
 - b. If you or a household member is sick, STAY HOME.
 - c. "Outdoor Worship," as the name implies, is "Outdoors." The point is to keep churches, homes, or businesses free of the coronavirus. Stay out of the facility at which you are meeting. It is the host's responsibility to see that this is the case.
 - d. Attendees should bring their own chair(s)
 - e. Cloth face coverings are required for anyone attending. Fresh masks may be provided to those who don't have one.
 - f. Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals/families/cars.
 - g. Limit gathering size to one that can accommodate the 6 feet distancing...no more than 15 in a gathering. We want to keep everyone safe. Anyone pushing the number attending over 15 must be turned away.

- h. Using an invite/RSVP system can help ensure groups of fifteen or fewer and is highly recommended. THIS IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT WHEN WORSHIP IS AT A HOME.
- i. For now, there should be no singing (we hope this will change as we learn more about the virus from public health authorities).
- j. It is required to bring your own hand sanitizer and use it.
- k. Eating is okay if you: bring your own food, have hand sanitizer/disinfecting wipes, use single-use utensils and easy to handle food.
- l. There will be no serving of Holy Communion.
- m. If you are meeting at one of our churches, you are not to use the bathroom (remember that part about keeping our buildings free of Coronavirus)
- n. For worship – Materials will be provided by the church to anyone who would like to host an outdoor worship at their home. Scriptures are to be read. Prayers are to be lifted up. The sermon from the pastor may be used from the online worship service.
- o. The pastor will be notified (in writing or email) after the completion of the event, with a list of those in attendance and a brief assertion that the requirements for social distancing were met. Attendance is important for potential contact-tracing in case of COVID-19.

Other Ministry Items for Phase 2

- 1. “Shepherding” phone calls will continue for members.
- 2. Plans are being made for Fall Preschool. This is still evolving and we are following the examples of other preschools in Anchorage. There is no other church-based preschool in Seward/Moose Pass. The preschool is not an “essential” service. While it serves a need in the community, it is a part-time, parent-led co-op preschool. This is not a full-time daycare enabling essential workers to get to their jobs. It WILL NOT be able to meet until Phase 3 and after a plan is approved for how it will function in the time of COVID-19. We are trying to follow the lead of some of the Anchorage preschools, particularly the preschool at St. John UMC. As of July 1 (the time of this writing), how it can function is unclear.
- 3. Assessment of our finances.
- 4. Moving the congregation to consider online Christian Education for the fall, perhaps in partnership with other area churches (there are some good resources at “Work of the People” and “Amplify Media”)
- 5. Recording for online worship may happen in our churches with only one person/one family unit present when singing.
- 6. Assessment of online worship options when allowed back into the sanctuary for in-person worship (right now it has been recommended to use Switcher Studio, but will need to increase internet bandwidth to make that possible.)
- 7. Online ZOOM fellowship will continue after our online worship.
- 8. Collection box for offering at Seward UMC assembled in preparation for collecting offering without passing plate.
- 9. Fellowship tables taken down to discourage fellowship after worship at Seward UMC.

10. Continue to emphasize online giving option and encouraging members and friends to send tithes and offering by mail.
11. Building ventilation needs to be assessed prior to phase 3.
12. Committee meetings will take place via ZOOM.
13. Small groups of volunteers able to access the facility for essential church services (cleaning, offering, etc.) with social distancing, masks, and sanitizing high touch areas.

MINISTRY IN PHASE 3

Continue with items from Phase 2

1. This includes the possibility of outdoor worship and fellowship (either socially distanced in chairs or cars)
2. This includes prerecording solo (or household) music with no one else in the church and proper sanitizing afterwards.
3. This includes online fellowship options and phone call "Shepherding" to keep people connected.
4. This includes the continuation of online worship.

In-Person Worship

1. When Phase 3 is reached, in-person, in-church worship may begin again. Signs will be posted to remind about physical distancing, pews will be moved to accommodate social distancing requirements, face masks will be worn by all in attendance and masks will be provided for those without masks. Those (over the age of 2) who refuse to wear a mask or who have health issues making that difficult, will be directed to our online worship components.
2. Because there will be no singing, worship components using spoken word and alternative music (such as bell choir) will be emphasized.
3. The following requirements will be met:
 - a. The pastor or an appointed worship leader (informed of all the requirements) will lead.
 - b. Signage will be posted on the door reminding attendees of the risk of attending.
 - c. Anyone presenting as sick will be asked to return home.
 - d. If you or a household member is sick, STAY HOME. If you (or a member of your household) have tested positive for COVID, STAY HOME. If you (or a member of your household) are awaiting test results for COVID, STAY HOME. If you, or a household member, have travelled out of state in the last 14 days, STAY HOME. There will be an online worship you can participate in.
 - e. A cleaning protocol will be established prior to opening the church. The church must be cleaned after each worship service. The "cleaning crew" (a sign-up list) we have utilized for before-worship cleaning will transition to after-worship cleaning.
 - f. Bathrooms will be limited to one person at a time and must be cleaned after each service.

- g. Unused rooms will be blocked/locked/off-limits.
 - h. There will be no childcare.
 - i. Cloth face coverings are required for anyone attending. Fresh masks may be provided to those who don't have one.
 - j. Cloth face coverings will be required of worship leaders/preachers.
 - k. Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals/families.
 - l. Limit gathering size to one that can accommodate the 6 feet distancing. When available pews are occupied, no one else is to be admitted. This number cannot exceed 50 (which should not be a problem for either congregation)
 - m. Because of social-distancing, the "children's sermon" will not be done at the front of the sanctuary with children present. Nor will children be excused to "nursery" or "children's church." Children will remain seated with their families.
 - n. Because of the size of the sanctuaries and average attendance in our congregations, we do not anticipate needing to RSVP for worship.
 - o. For now, there should be no singing (we hope this will change as we learn more about the virus from public health authorities). All sung worship pieces will be pre-recorded by individuals/families in homes.
 - p. It is encouraged to bring your own hand sanitizer and use it.
 - q. There will be no food service. People may bring their own coffee/water/snacks for themselves and family.
 - r. There will be no serving of Holy Communion.
 - s. Fellowshiping will be discouraged with the removal of chairs and tables.
 - t. Worship will be a mixture of live and pre-recorded worship. We will need to have monitors/televisions to show the pre-recorded pieces. Parts of worship will be filmed/recorded to provide an online experience for those who are not coming to worship.
 - u. Attendance will be recorded and kept in the church office if there is a need for contact tracing.
 - v. The church will be cleaned after each worship service, with particular attention to high-touch surfaces.
4. If there is a desire to continue in-person worship at homes, hosts may choose to host "house churches" at their place of residence ONLY IF ALL REQUIREMENTS OF IN-CHURCH WORSHIP (ABOVE) ARE MET.

Other Ministry Items for Phase 3

- 1. Sprouts preschool will be able to operate.
 - a. At this point we are unsure what that is going to look like. Most preschools really don't know what the Fall will look like.
 - b. We know that we will need to follow social distancing protocols that are age-appropriate while protecting the teachers and parent-volunteers
 - c. Students will need to bring their own food.
 - d. Outdoor activities will be emphasized
 - e. There may even be an online component.
 - f. Conversations with prospective parents are happening this summer

2. Christian Education will be moved almost entirely online throughout phase 3. Those who cannot access the online resources will be able to attend limited, in-person, socially-distanced classes. The hope is that all participants will be able to access content online.
3. Committee Meetings will be online via the ZOOM platform with a limited in-person component for those who are unable to access the ZOOM platform.
4. We will continue finding ways to partner with other churches in Seward
5. The churches will be available for other essential user groups, as long as they maintain proper physical distancing and cleaning of the churches. As of June 2020 the only regular user groups at Seward UMC are the preschool and the community choir (which will not be meeting this Fall)
6. There is only one staff person. But designated volunteers may work in the building at this time. Efforts will be made to socially-distance staff and volunteers and to sanitize regularly.

MINISTRY IN PHASE FOUR AND BEYOND

Continue with items from Phase 3

1. This includes outdoor worship and fellowship
2. This includes prerecording solo (or household) music with no one else in the church and proper sanitizing afterwards.
3. This includes online fellowship options and phone call “Shepherding” to keep people connected.
4. This includes the continuation of online worship.
5. This includes in-person, socially-distanced worship in our sanctuaries with all of the requirements for cleaning and signage.
6. This includes online educational opportunities to supplement limited in-person opportunities.
7. This includes essential user groups (such as the preschool)
8. There will still be no singing.

In-Person Worship in Phase Four

1. Alternatives to typical worship practices
 - a. Offering collected without passing plate
 - b. Alternative greetings (waves/air-hugs/”Live long and prosper”) to traditional handshakes and hugs.
 - c. No hand-holding for our benediction.
2. Children’s time can begin again. “Children’s Church” can begin again with cleaning of the children’s classroom and attendance being taken (for contact tracing if needed)
3. Limited coffee hour can be provided – with an emphasis on single use plates/cups and pre-plated food items (to limit the number of hands touching things) with gloves and sanitizing materials provided for those serving food.

4. Sung music will be prerecorded. The piano or bells may be played.
5. Hymnals may be used again for reading, reference, or study. Still no singing.
6. While masks may not be required, they will be provided to those who request them.
(The Reimagining Life Together plan for the Greater Northwest Area does not mandate masks for Phase 4 but it is hard to imagine that it won't still be part of our worship experience at that time.)
7. Worship will be blended worship service with live and recorded components so that it can be available online.
8. Some imagining needs to occur, asking what our "High Holy Days" look like (Christmas, Easter, etc.)

Other Ministry Items for Phase 4

1. Sprouts preschool will be able to operate.
2. Christian Education can be a mixture of in-person and online
3. Committee Meetings will be a mixture of in-person and online.
4. We will continue finding ways to partner with other churches in Seward.
5. Seward UMC will meet with St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Resurrection Lutheran Church, and Sacred Heart Catholic Church to determine if and how our seasonal Progressive Dinners and Soup Suppers can happen.
6. Since no singing is allowed in Phase 4, the Community Choir will still not meet.