

**Returning to Worship Guidance Document**  
**St. John Lutheran Church--Seward, Nebraska**  
*Last update—August 10, 2020*

As we have reopened at St. John for in-person worship, we are following the state of Nebraska's [Guidelines for the Conduct of Faith-Based Services](#). We have received expert guidance that indicates that our congregation is not legally liable should infection occur.

Our concern is for all who will be present. We also are concerned for those who are at-risk and should not be returning to the sanctuary at this time. Loving our neighbor at this time may include doing things that are uncomfortable to us personally, but could be a blessing to our neighbor. We realize that the particular question of whether or not to wear masks has become controversial and polarizing, but we believe that wearing masks is an important precaution that provides care for our neighbors. *Therefore, everyone three years of age and older will be required to wear a mask.* The Ministry of St. John will provide you with a cloth mask if you do not have one. This will be for you to keep and bring with you to future services. Disposable masks will also be provided.

Individuals and families have the freedom to decide whether or not to return to in-person services with the present restrictions or continue to participate in worship online. Each individual and/or family needs to make a prayerful decision about whether or not the time is right for them. Individuals need to know that there is no way to entirely eliminate the risk of infection in any public gathering.

Before and following each service, the facilities will be cleaned and sanitized by our custodial staff and trained volunteers. They will be following a process that has been developed under the guidance of the Center for Disease Control and with input from our Parish Nurse.

We thank you for your prayers and support as we gradually return to in-person worship. It is our prayer that together we show love and compassion to our brothers and sisters in Christ, respecting varying opinions about levels of risk and best ways to proceed as we come together again.

**Worship Services—Sanctuary—updated as of August 10, 2020**

In-person worship resumed the weekend of June 7, 2020. Currently, there are in-person services on Sundays at 8:30am and 11:00am. The celebration of Holy Communion is held in both services each Sunday.

**Brief Service of the Word and Holy Communion—Narthex**

Brief Communion Services for up to 26 people are held each Tuesday and Thursday morning at 11:00am in the narthex lobby.

**Making Reservations**

Worshippers must make reservations for the service they plan to attend that week through a link on the church website or by calling the church office. You can make your reservation for the week beginning Mondays at 8:00am. When you make your reservation, you will need to give the number in your party and each of their names. The state defines a "party" as a group of people who live together. You may call the church office Monday through Friday from 8:00am-1:30pm.

### **Current Guidelines for Worshiping at St. John—updated as of May 28, 2020**

1. If you or anyone in your household is sick, or if you are at risk of contracting the virus, you are encouraged to stay home and continue to worship with us online until further notice. This includes:
  - a. The elderly
  - b. People with [underlying medical conditions](#)
  - c. People who have access to those at risk in nursing institutions
  - d. People who have upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms
  - e. People who live with someone with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms
  - f. People with COVID-19 or live with someone with COVID-19
  - g. People who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19
2. You will need to register for the day and service time that you desire. In order to follow the state-distancing guidelines, we have determined that we can seat 43 household groups/parties. The state defines a “party” as a group of people who live together.
3. You may enter through either the west or east entrances. Please maintain six-foot distancing as you enter. Check in at the Information Booth in the narthex. You will then be ushered to a seating location so that the sanctuary is filled from the front to the back.
4. Anyone three years of age and older will be required to wear masks at all times. Pastors, musicians, and readers are excluded for their parts of the service. Please bring your own masks. The Ministry of St. John will provide you with a mask if you do not have one.
5. Offerings will be gathered at the door when you leave the sanctuary.
6. Social distancing is to be maintained at all times. If a child needs to leave the sanctuary to use the bathroom, a parent/guardian is to accompany them.
7. When Holy Communion is offered, you will be directed by the ushers on receiving it. It will be served in a manner which has been developed by our Parish Nurse.
  - a. The preparation and handling of the elements will be done after proper handwashing, while wearing gloves and masks.
  - b. Pastors and assistants will disinfect their hands and wear masks and gloves.
  - c. Six-foot markings will be in each aisle for guidance on social distancing.
  - d. The wafer will be dropped into your hand to avoid hand-to-hand contact and you will place it in your mouth.
  - e. Individual communion cups will be used, and communicants will remove their cup from the tray in order to receive the wine.
8. After the close of the service, you will remain in your pew until your party is dismissed by the usher staff. Please observe state guidelines that do not permit fellowship or social gathering on the premises before or after the services.
9. The 8:30am service will be livestreamed so there may be some pre-service guidance given due to part of our family of faith worshipping online with us simultaneously.

*Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) May this be our guide as together we seek to proclaim and practice the love of Christ.*