

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Guidelines for In Person Gatherings April 2021

Shared settings inherently warrant greater safety measures to protect from COVID-19. To reduce risk and possible exposure, BLC has developed criteria and defined processes to help our congregation make informed decisions that frame how we practice loving our neighbors including the most vulnerable among us. As we implement these processes, we will move slowly and with caution.

The standards developed and affirmed by Council have taken into account guidelines established by the ELCA, New York State, CDC and DOH. These decisions may be modified based on current conditions. We will follow the guidance of New York State for our region in moving through the phases of opening and closing activities, to the extent that we can safely do so.

General Guidelines to be followed when inside BLC:

- While inside BLC, anyone over the age of 2 is expected to wear a mask/facial covering at all times, maintain recommended social distancing (currently 6 feet or more), practice recommended hand hygiene and follow cleaning protocols before and after gatherings.
- Sanitizing stations and masks will be located in the hallways of the building. Rooms will be equipped with supplies to clean surfaces following all gatherings.
- Groups will refrain from eating and drinking while inside the building. The kitchen space may not be accessed during meetings.

In Person Worship:

Limited, in-person worship will resume in May 2021, assuming current levels of infection do not increase. We will continue to closely monitor guidance provided by local and state health officials and will make changes to capacity limits or suspend in-person activities if conditions warrant. As of April 2021,

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attendance will be capped at 70 (excluding worship leaders and volunteers), reservations will be taken for a maximum of 60 attendees to allow for variations in number and size of family units and the 6' spacing requirement between units. The narthex will be used for any overflow attendees for a service.

We will use an online reservation system to track capacity. We are committed to providing access for those who wish to gather for worship.

BLC Sponsored Group Gatherings:

1. Gatherings must be scheduled in advance with the Church Office. The meeting organizer will be required to complete a guest log at the time of the meeting and will leave the completed form in the designated mail slot.
2. The size of the group and space availability will determine where the group will gather.
3. Group gatherings may take place in rooms throughout building, with groups adhering to posted size limits for each space:
 - Small Classrooms: 3
 - Larger Classrooms: 4
 - LYO Room: 8
 - Narthex and Sanctuary: 70
 - Fellowship Hall: 30
 - Adult Education: 15
 - Work Room: 5

Outside Group Requests (i.e. Boy Scouts and music lessons):

1. Same criteria as for BLC sponsored group gatherings **AND**
2. Per BLC's safety plan, a responsible adult must be present at all times.

In the event of an exposure/positive diagnosis of COVID-19:

1. If a member of the congregation/meeting attendee is/was physically present for an indoor gathering and tests positive for COVID 19, they are strongly encouraged to notify the Church Office so that Bethlehem can follow notification requirements. This communication will likely come from the Local Health Department (LHD). Pastor Amy will be responsible for

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communicating the information to officers and staff. Based on the level of risk/exposure, Pastor and officers will determine the need for contacting others as appropriate.

2. BLC will follow the recommendations/protocols for cleaning and notifications from our LHD.
3. Although not required, we encourage anyone who suspects they may be diagnosed/experiencing symptoms to reach out for pastoral support.
4. BLC will maintain confidentiality as required by the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#).

Additional Guidance for In-Person Activities:

At Bethlehem, one of our purposes as a community is to CARE for one another. As we begin to return to in-person gatherings, we are committed to continuing to listen to and care for the most vulnerable among us. We recognize that vulnerability looks different for different people. For example, some people are more comfortable with outdoor gatherings than indoor gatherings. Some people are happy to engage in activities together provided all people are vaccinated, others may not have access to vaccinations or may live with people at elevated risk. Some people are happy to engage virtual meeting spaces like Zoom, and others are challenged by that environment. Planning gatherings in this complex environment is challenging.

We encourage all groups to make arrangements with an eye toward the greatest accessibility that the entire group can support, recognizing that plans may change from gathering to gathering to account for the needs of different people in the group.

At Bethlehem, we commit to doing this by:

- Listening deeply to the safety and accessibility concerns of those in each group.
- Being flexible in how we plan for and arrange meeting times and locations in order to meet various concerns and needs within the group.

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- Being attentive to how plans can be made that practice the highest level of care and caution for all in the group.
- Being accessible to the greatest number of people in the group.
- Not demanding vaccination as a prerequisite for participation in group activities.

These expectations remain in place.

- We stay home if we are sick, have a fever, or may have had exposure.
- We wear masks indoors at church.
- We practice physical distancing and adhere to other [safe activity guidance](#) as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control.
- We reserve space through the church office.
- We complete meeting forms for each gathering.
- We remain attentive and respectful of posted room capacity limits within our church building.
- We give preference to sharing food in outdoor gatherings.

Document last revised: April 27, 2021 by BLC Re-Opening Team