

To the Congregation of Shalom,

As Shalom's mission states, I'm sure we are all looking forward to gathering once again to "CELEBRATE IN WORSHIP!" Hebrews 10 gives us instruction and encouragement, "Therefore brothers (and sisters), since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith... and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrew 10:19-25).

Meeting together virtually for worship over the past several weeks has certainly been a change for all of us. Hopefully we are continuing to nurture a vibrant relationship with Jesus as we have time and opportunity to spend time with Jesus. While we have not been able to gather publically, perhaps the desire for corporate worship has grown and we have a deeper appreciation for the gathering of believers as we lift up our hearts before the Lord.

As we intend to re-open for public worship services on June 7, we wanted to share this "plan of action" so that we are all informed of some changes in accommodation to the reality of COVID-19.

Before we get to the plan below, let's start with two additional notes. First, please be patient. This is new for everyone. It will take longer to get everyone seated for the service, and it will take longer to have everyone exit the building. Please plan accordingly.

Second, live guilt free. Physical attendance at a Shalom worship service is not required by anyone. In compliance with CDC guidelines, if you are sick, or in higher-risk categories, or if you work with or for people in the higher-risk categories, or if you are not comfortable with a public gathering at this time, you are encouraged to stay home. You are encouraged to do so with a clear conscience. Yes, Shalom is gathering for corporate worship, but if you choose to stay home for reasons of health and safety, you ought not to have a guilty conscience before the Lord. We will make every effort to provide a clean, safe worshipping space. However, we cannot guarantee that you won't get sick. We cannot completely eliminate the risk of exposure. Use your discretion in your worship attendance decisions.

What's Next? Coming Back Together for Worship

We look forward with great anticipation to coming together again in worship. Because we may be months or more from an effective regimen of treatment or a vaccine for COVID-19, we will still need to practice great hygiene and physical distancing when we come together. As a result, these are the changes we are implementing. While this is our current plan, please know that it is subject to change.

- A. **Morning Service.** For the time being, we will have one morning service at our usual time of 9am. We will be practicing social distancing guidelines. We will do our best to ensure the safety of our congregates. In order to prepare for seating capacity, we ask that you fill out the attached survey monkey (one per family). If our sanctuary is filled to capacity with social distancing guidelines in place, then the narthex will be used for some overflow, but it is possible that you won't be able to remain in the building. If this happens, it will be taken into account in future planning.
- B. **Live streaming.** On May 20, Shalom's Council approved to move forward with a plan for livestreaming. As there has been a significant learning curve for us recently in recording services for online worship, a similar learning curve will be before us in livestreaming. Since this was just approved, it will take time to install the new system. The best online option available for participating in Shalom's service on June 7 will be emailed to you on June 6.
- C. **Illness.** If you or someone in your family is sick, or has been sick in the past week, please stay home. This is a great way to show your love for your neighbor. We know everyone wants to get back to worship, but we need to exercise caution.
- D. **Compromised Groups.** Since COVID-19 affects certain groups more negatively than others, we encourage the following groups of people to strongly consider staying home.
1. Those with underlying health conditions that compromise their immune system.
 2. Senior members of our church
 3. Those who care for immune-compromised people or seniors.
 4. Anyone who feels uncomfortable being in a large gathering of people.
- E. **Before coming to worship.**
1. Wash your hands.
 2. Masks – Our expectation is that everyone will be wearing a mask throughout your time within the building (especially during singing!). We recognize the whole issue of wearing masks has become a hot button issue for some, however, at this point, we believe it is a way that each of us can show love to the members of our congregation. If you don't feel comfortable complying with this guideline, then we ask that you please stay home until we are able to lift this expectation. If you don't have a mask, we will have some available in paper bags as you enter, but you are encouraged to provide your own mask. For your safety, ushers will be wearing masks as they help you in and out of the sanctuary.
 3. Bathrooms – Please don't plan on using the bathrooms at church. If your children do need to use the bathroom, please assist them. The bathrooms will still be open, but we can limit the possible spread of the virus if as few people as possible use them.
 4. Entering the Church – There may be a line waiting to enter the building, please allow space between families and be patient as people wait to be ushered.

F. Logistics while in the building

1. Social Distancing – Please maintain social distancing at all times.
2. Greeters – We will have door openers instead of greeters.
3. Hand Sanitizer – There will be hand sanitizer stations as soon as you enter the building.
4. Bathrooms – Please use the bathrooms only for emergencies. We will leave the men's bathroom door propped open to minimize touching the handle. There will be wipes to disinfect the women's bathroom door handle before and after you touch the door handle.
5. Drinking Fountain – It will be turned off. You are welcome to bring a bottle of water into church if you think you will need it.
6. Coats and Jackets – If you wear a coat or jacket to church, please take it with you to your seats. This will help us avoid congregating around the coat hangers before and after the service.
7. Mailboxes – Please do not crowd around the mailboxes. Please wait your turn if others are already in front of the mailboxes.
8. Nursery – The nursery will not be staffed. We are temporarily removing the toys. You are still welcomed to use it as a "cry-room". Please sanitize the door handle before and after use. Disinfectant wipes will be available. If you need to use the room, please bring some toys from home.
9. Coffee – Until further notice, we will postpone serving coffee.
10. Parents with Children – Please be aware of your children after the service. Help us make sure they don't go back into the building after the service and that they don't run amongst those choosing to social distance in the lawn after the service. Also, encourage them to respect other children's space. Be sensitive that all families are handling this in different ways and be respectful.
11. Surfaces – We will seek to limit the frequency of touching common surfaces and objects. Doors will be opened, toys will be removed from nursery, hymnals and Bibles will be removed from the sanctuary. Please bring your own Bible.
12. Safety Team – For your safety, this team will address any issues that may arise. Please don't engage in behaviors that might cause a confrontation. We ask that you consider how your actions will affect or be interpreted by others at church and when in doubt, show love.
13. Meetings – Virtual options (by phone or online) will continue to be utilized whenever possible for all non-worship activities. If social distancing can be maintained, in person meetings will be allowed at church. As per normal protocol, we ask that you schedule any meetings with Dawn. Please clean the space you use. Cleaning supplies are available on tables within the Fellowship Hall and Narthex.

G. **Prayer meeting.** The prayer time with Council will be held at 8:30 in the Triple Room.

H. **Worship.**

1. Seating – We will have ushers help you find seating. Please do not seat yourselves. **Please respect and be patient with the ushers.** They are trying to fit the maximum number of people in church while maintaining social distancing. We will have less seating than normal.
 - a. Families – If at all possible, please have your family prepared to sit at the same time. This will help the ushers fit everyone in our limited space and minimize you coming into close contact with others.
 - b. Spacing – We will seat families together. Chairs have been re-arranged in the Sanctuary to provide maximum seating while social distancing. You will be seated with three chairs between groups.
2. Offering – We will have collection baskets by the back doors of the sanctuary to place your offering in as you exit. The deacons will not collect it during the service. Other offering avenues will continue:
 - a. Online giving from Shalom's website
 - b. Direct Deposit
 - c. Mail a check, using your envelopes
3. Communion – Scheduled for June 7 has been cancelled. Prepackaged elements will be used the next time we celebrate communion.
4. Exiting – The ushers will also usher you out after the service. When you are ushered out, please leave the building. The doors will be propped open at the end of the service by the door openers. After the service, if you are going to socialize, please use the lawn and maintain proper distance guidelines.

Finally, understand that while we are planning to come together again, the situation could change if circumstances change (spike in COVID-19 cases locally, new governor's proclamation, etc.). The Council is constantly monitoring and evaluating the situation and will keep you posted if that is the case. We thank everyone for your prayers, patience, and understanding in the matter. We are looking forward to once again meeting in person as the family of God.

Again, please be patient with us and each other as we seek to navigate into this new normal.

Blessings,

The Council of Shalom CRC