

Frequently Asked Questions about Prince of Peace and Covid -19

How has POP been making decisions concerning our ministry during Covid-19?

Ultimately, decisions are made by the Congregation Council whom the congregation has selected to discern the holy direction to which we are called. Early on in the pandemic the Council compiled a series of faith based ethical principles to guide us in making decisions. In addition, the Council wrote a Covid-19 Ministry Action Plan, which has been updated twice. Part of this plan was to appoint a Safety Team composed of several members with skill sets involving public health, insurance, legal issues, our property and worship. This team after consulting recommendations and guidelines from the ELCA churchwide and synodical bodies (and other denominational bodies) as well as county, state and federal public health offices have made recommendations to the Council.

What is a short summary of the Faith Based Ethical Principles?

Jesus reminded us that we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, love our neighbors as ourselves and in the New Commandment to love one another as Jesus has first loved us. Jesus also reminded us that everyone is our neighbor and that we are to take special care of those the rest of society would overlook: the poor, the vulnerable, and the outcasts. We affirm that each and every person is made in the image of God and that all persons are to be cared for in the most compassionate of ways to ensure that life is preserved and protected.

When will POP open for worship?

We have continued to worship. We have offered a variety of ways to continue to worship during the pandemic:

- Weekly printed service of scripture, prayers, hymns and a reflection.
- The above components for worship included in the weekly email along with links to music selected by Mr. Kirk and a Sermon preached by br. Brett, our pastor.
- Multiple weekly opportunities to gather for worship on the online meeting application, called Zoom.
- When the weather and covid-19 metrics permit we gather outside for worship and the celebration of Communion.

When will we worship in the Sanctuary?

We know that the primary way the virus is transmitted is through breathing particles in the air. Therefore, indoor gatherings are the riskiest environments for Covid-19 transmission. We have agreed to adhere to the following Covid-19 threshold guidelines offered by the ELCA Conference of Bishops:

*We may gather for **OUTDOOR WORSHIP** when the following conditions exists in our county or synod for two continuous weeks or more....*

- *The percentage of positive Covid-19 tests are 10% or less and*
- *The Rate of Transmission is 1.15 or less*

*We may gather for **INDOOR WORSHIP** when the following conditions exists for two continuous weeks or more....*

- *The percentage of positive Covid-19 tests are 5% or less and*
- *The Rate of Transmission is .85 or less*

A good place to check for the current numbers is www.covidactnow.org

As of May 4, 2021: Percent Positive = 4.8, and Transmission Rate = .78. The first date under 5%.

Other congregations are worshipping inside, why not us?

The Leadership of POP continues to make decisions which we feel are in the overall best interest of our members and our mission. Many are also not meeting for indoor worship either but are doing similar things to us. Within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ELCA the individual congregation has a great deal of say with regard to many decisions. Our Churchwide and Synodical Bodies provide council and recommendations on many things and ultimately, most decisions fall directly upon the leadership of the specific congregation. The leadership at Prince of Peace has decided to follow many of the recommendations offered because we are choosing to live in *The Jesus Ethic of Love for all people*, especially the most vulnerable among us.

I am vaccinated do I still need to wear a mask?

At the present moment while participating in congregational events, Yes. Remember that wearing a mask is not just to protect ourselves alone but also to protect our neighbor, like getting vaccinated is not solely for ourselves but for all of our neighbors, the herd. We know that vaccinated people can still contract the virus (with symptoms or not) and can still transmit the virus. Remember – Love your Neighbor.

On April 28th the CDC announced that we do not need to wear masks outside anymore, do we still need to wear them at outdoor worship?

Short answer, Yes! It is essential that we look into the details of each pronouncement. Attached is the graphic provided by the CDC concerning this. We are not a crowded outdoor event and people are still keeping distance of six feet, **but** we are singing. Multiple studies have showing that singing without a mask can project particles (potentially the virus) up to 27 feet! Therefore, in love of our neighbor we will continue to wear masks for outdoor worship.

Choosing Safer Activities

	Unvaccinated People	Your Activity	Fully Vaccinated People
		Outdoor	
Safest		Walk, run, or bike outdoors with members of your household	
		Attend a small, outdoor gathering with fully vaccinated family and friends	
		Attend a small, outdoor gathering with fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people	
Less Safe		Dine at an outdoor restaurant with friends from multiple households	
Least Safe		Attend a crowded, outdoor event, like a live performance, parade, or sports event	

— The CDC released updated guidance on outdoor mask usage. CDC

What is next, when will there be a change?

The NJ Department of Public Health and the Governor's Office affirms that we are on target to have 70% of NJ vaccinated by the end of June which would be great news for our overall safety. Therefore, in the middle of June the POP Safety team will assemble and assess the numbers and the situation to make recommendations to the Congregation Council on next steps. At the current trajectory, early July is looking good.

What will worship be like when we return to inside?

As we approach that reality the Congregation Council with the input of the Safety Team will issue a comprehensive guide. Please stay tuned.