

Making Safe Choices: Phase 4

Grace UMC Plan for Use of the Building during Covid-19 Phase 4 Beginning June 26, 2020

On June 26, Illinois entered Phase 4 of the Governor's Covid-19 Pandemic Response. We celebrate that some in our community have been able to return to work and various levels of reopening are taking place. We recognize the difficulty of making decisions as to the return to in-person worship, especially when the struggle around opening schools and businesses is still so real. Our local School Districts 203 and 204 have opted to defer in-class learning for the first quarter, or until Nov. 2. There has been a loosening of restrictions elsewhere, but along with that, a rise in Covid-19 positivity rates for those being tested.

The Northern Illinois Conference, the IL Dept of Public Health and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) have developed best practices for our use. With those in mind, Grace Church is providing the following to guide our decision-making until we enter Phase 5 when a vaccine is ready. According to these guidelines, we can move forward with limited plans for reopening, which means we can do some of what we've always done, but we have to do it in new ways.

This is, indeed, the most difficult phase to negotiate as we work to stay safe in community with those we know and love. We all recognize the fluidity of the situation we are in. All guidelines are subject to change as dictated by current Covid-19 rates and state guidelines.

As a community of faith that promotes trusted relationships and caring ministries, Grace is bound by the responsibility to 'first do no harm' for our members and guests. Many of the spikes in Covid-19 positivity rates have been traced to social gatherings where precautions were thought to be unnecessary. Therefore, we will take every precaution as we allow groups to meet once again in the building.

Below is a summary of these guidelines to date:

GROUP MEETINGS

Groups sponsored by organizations *other* than Grace UMC will not be able to meet in the building as we cannot track their participants or monitor behavior.

Beginning Sept. 14, meetings in the building are once again allowed for Grace ministries, classes, committees and teams that can comply with the requirements listed below.

1. Only Grace ministries, classes and teams will be allowed to meet in the building for now subject to the following restrictions.
2. Groups must be limited to 12 or fewer participants.
3. Groups must reserve a room and commit to using only the room that is reserved.
4. Group participants must use the hand sanitizer at the door upon entering the building and again upon leaving the building.
5. Group participants will follow social distancing guidelines.
6. Group participants will need to wear masks whenever in the building.

7. Groups must limit meetings to 50-minutes or less. (The longer we're together the more dangerous it is to meet indoors.)
8. Group leaders will need to have a list of attendees available in case contact tracing becomes necessary.
9. Participants who are ill or have a fever should not attend.
10. Food and/or beverages are not to be shared. Personal use water bottles are allowed. The church coffee stations and drinking fountains are not to be used.
11. Participants should exit the building immediately at the close of the meeting.
12. Children will not be allowed except as specifically planned for in Children's programming and ministry events.

Grace Church will provide the following:

1. Hand sanitizing stations are placed at the entrance of the building.
2. Sanitizing wipes will be available so that participants can assist the custodial staff in cleaning the surfaces they have touched.
3. The family restrooms will be open. The other restrooms will be closed. There is a family restroom on each floor.
4. The Trustees have purchased a fogger to sanitize surfaces.
5. The church will schedule meetings at least 24 hours apart.
6. The church staff will clean and sanitize all commonly used surfaces every day.
7. The church retains the right to monitor participants in each group to be sure we are following safe-distancing guidelines and wearing masks.

Additional notes and recommendations:

While the above allow for meetings in the building, we recommend that groups continue meeting online when possible.

Any group that desires to meet in-person should also offer an online option for those unable to join them. Grace has a Chromebook available to set up a simultaneous online meeting for those unable to attend in person. Please contact Ashley Pierce in the office for more information and indicate this need when scheduling your meeting. Someone in your group will need to provide setup and operation for this online connection.

The building will remain locked except those for times when groups are expected. Please call the office to enter the building at other times at 630-355-1748.

STAFF

As we enter Phase 4, staff may return to work in the building. Masks are required for staff unless they are working in their offices. Staff who can successfully work from home may continue to do so. Staff members planning to meet with anyone in the building should greet that person at the door and offer a mask if needed. Staff members who are not feeling well should stay home. Any staff person traveling to areas with higher Covid positivity rates (as determined by the CDC) should stay home upon return for at least 14 days.

BUILDING ACCESS

The building and office will remain locked. Church members requiring access should call the office (630-355-1748) to schedule their time in the building and to receive instructions as to guidelines and room usage. The office is staffed from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday in the summer with the addition of Fridays until 1 p.m. in the Fall.

WORSHIP

ONLINE WORSHIP WILL CONTINUE

We will continue to provide worship online for the foreseeable future as follows:

1. The Online Church video we have been preparing, with additional participation by our 9 Gathering Praise Team and worship leaders
2. Livestream of our in-person traditional service from the sanctuary beginning early October, if the current Covid-19 trends allow.

THE RETURN OF IN-PERSON WORSHIP

Beginning in early October (exact date to be announced), Grace UMC hopes to offer a weekly in-person worship service on Sunday mornings at 10:30 am. Worship will be limited to 50 participants, including leadership and volunteers.

There will be several restrictions observed for this worship service:

1. Reservations will be required to limit the numbers.
2. Socially distanced seating will be provided.
3. Face masks are required.
4. Worshipers will enter and exit the building and the sanctuary as our signs direct.
5. Worshipers must exit the building immediately following the service.
6. Hand sanitizer is available upon entering and exiting.
7. Hymnals and Bibles will be removed.
8. Liturgy will be on the screen rather than in bulletins
9. Worship services will be no longer than 40 minutes.
10. There will be no singing of hymns, recitation of liturgy, prayers, passing the peace, passing of offering plates, etc., greeting handshakes, etc.
11. Children must remain with their families.
12. Those experiencing symptoms of illness or fever should not attend.
13. Those returning from travel to any of the CDC identified states with elevated Covid-19 positivity rates should not attend for at least 14 days.

OUTDOOR WORSHIP on FIRST SUNDAY WILL CONTINUE AS WEATHER PERMITS

Watch for registration information for these outdoor gatherings.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

All "REGULAR" children and youth faith formation programming will remain online.

"Regular" programming includes Sunday school, weekly choir rehearsals and youth group meetings. We have a number of volunteer teachers who are not able to return to in-person programming. As the church, we do not want to risk the health of our leaders in any way.

We do encourage outdoor events that allow for social distancing and for the vital personal connection needed in the faith formation of our young people; for their emotional and spiritual connection to the church and to one another. The Grace Church property is ideal for outdoor activities as long as proper distance and supervision is maintained. Regular programming may also be moved outdoors, but only in addition to an online component, so that all children and youth are included.

PARENTS' DAY OUT (PDO)

Grace Parents' Day Out has been diligently working to develop a plan for reopening and is scheduled to begin serving registered families on Nov 3. A separate report outlines their plan and is available by calling the office at 630-355-1748. PDO has coordinated their plan with District 203 and 204 School Districts, as well as DCFS and CDC requirements. It has been reviewed by appropriate staff and Grace Church Council.

GRACE GARDENING/MAINTENANCE

1. Outdoor gardening and maintenance is allowed as long as spatial distancing guidelines are followed.
2. Indoor maintenance projects sponsored by our Trustees are being allowed following guidelines for wearing masks, proper distancing, group size limit and reporting visits to the office.

NON-GRACE UMC GROUPS

Groups sponsored by organizations other than Grace UMC will not be allowed to meet in the building during Phase 4. We are not able to require attendee lists and adequately schedule and monitor outside groups.

LARGE GROUP EVENTS (any with over 12 participants)

Will not be allowed in the building yet.

Large group activities are difficult to monitor. Even though the CDC allows for groups of up to 50 persons to meet during this Phase 4, we have only 3 areas that could accommodate larger groups. Most large events traditionally involve meals and/or extended meeting times. Grace UMC doesn't have the staff or volunteer base to monitor compliance with distancing and masking guidelines for such events. With the data still fluctuating on the flow of the virus indoors, we are not comfortable in risking the health of participants or volunteers for large group events.

All of the above will be reviewed on a regular basis. Grace will tighten or loosen restrictions as allowed and/or required.