

# VINJE GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON MINISTRY DURING THE COVID CRISIS

*Guidelines based on recommendations from the Center for Disease Control, Minnesota Department of Health, Kandiyohi County Emergency Management, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.*

## Suggested Criteria

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Vinje will follow the ELCA's criteria (outlined as necessary in Considerations for Returning to In-person Worship) and the recommendations of state and local medical experts. We assume that even after we have returned to in-person gatherings it is possible that we will need to suspend those gatherings due to the future spread of the virus. When making such decisions, a primary factor Vinje leadership will consider is the current infection rates for the county and state. Other factors include our local capacity for testing, the amount of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers, and the availability of hospitalization and ICU rooms.

## Sunday Morning Worship

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### **General Information**

- A limited in-person worship service will be offered on Sunday mornings. The service will consist of the following: prelude, scripture reading, sermon, musical offerings, intercessory prayer, and postlude.
- Our online and radio worship broadcasts will continue for everyone who chooses not to attend the in-person offering. We will continue to encourage those at high-risk to stay home.
- Sunday morning worship will be limited to no more than 75 people. This is the number we feel would allow us to follow physical distancing guidelines. Reservations are required and will be taken Monday-Wednesday to allow us to plan ahead. Due to the expense and effort of organizing during COVID, a minimum of 35 people is required for in-person worship to be conducted.
- When making a reservation, in addition to name and number of people attending, a contact number must be provided.

## **Requirements**

- Appropriately worn face coverings (masks and/or face shields) must be worn by all in-person worshipers. A limited number of disposable masks will be made available for those who don't have their own. This is a requirement for in-person participation. Children under the age of 2 are exempt from this requirement.
- Prior to entering the building, all persons are asked to perform a "self-check" for COVID-19 symptoms. A graphical display will be provided as a reminder for all.
- We ask everyone to use proper hand washing techniques before entering the building. We also require people to use hand sanitizer as they enter.
- We will require anyone who has been exposed to COVID-19 to stay away from worship and church activities for two weeks. Likewise, those who are feeling ill are asked to stay home.
- Due to the inability to maintain a six-foot distance and the difficulty in keeping up with proper cleaning procedures, people will be strongly discouraged from using the bathrooms during the Sunday morning worship service except for emergency purposes only.

## **Entering & Exiting the Church and Sanctuary**

- Access will be limited to the west (parking lot) entrance for both the building and sanctuary. All those in attendance will enter and exit through the same doors.
- Doors will be propped open in an effort to reduce the number of surfaces worshipers must come in contact with.
- Ushers will direct you to a specific seating location. The sanctuary will fill from the front to the back and dismiss from the back to the front. The first in will be the last out. If you leave your seat during the service it may be difficult to re-enter. Preference for seating close to entrances will be given to families with young children.
- We will place tape on the hallway floors to indicate proper waiting spots as worshipers enter the sanctuary. These marks will maintain a six-foot distance.
- Hand sanitizer will be made available at every entrance to the sanctuary.
- Moving around during the worship service is discouraged.
- Following the worship service, members are encouraged to leave the building directly. There will be no fellowship time.
- The Pastors will not be at entrances greeting worshipers before or after the service.

## **Changes to Worship**

- Pencils, envelopes, Bibles, and hymnals will be removed from the sanctuary. Pew cushions will remain only in locations that are open for people to sit and will be kept at a 6-foot distance from the next pew cushions.
- The offering will not be collected by passing the offering plates. There will be an offering basket by each entrance to the sanctuary.

- Congregational singing will not take place during worship. Musical offerings from leaders will be a limited part of our worship services. Pre-recorded videos will also be utilized.
- The congregation will refrain from communal speaking of creeds, prayers, litanies etc.
- There will be no communion for in-person worship services. Not only would we not be able to maintain a proper distance, but it also excludes our more vulnerable members from joining us at the Lord's Table.
- In order to safeguard our staff and lessen the possibility of our pastors being infected at the same time, only one Vinje pastor will lead the in-person worship service each week.
- There will be no bulletins provided.
- Pictures will be taken during worship to allow for contact tracing if needed in the future.

## Other Impacts on Vinje's Ministry

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- Appropriately worn face coverings (masks and/or face shields) will be required for everyone entering the building (including staff). Staff will be allowed to remove their face coverings when in their offices alone.
- The sanctuary and frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and sanitized after every worship service.
- Funerals and weddings will abide by the same worship policies outlined above. Bulletins may be provided for these services.
- Building use by outside groups will continue to be suspended at this time.
- On weekdays, the building will be open only for staff and our Loving Arms ministry. Doors will remain locked and staff will not accept walk-in visits. Please call and have conversations over the phone.
- Small group gatherings outside the building will be allowed when scheduled in advanced with the staff.
- Pastors will be experimenting with small group gatherings of the congregation, keeping in mind and abiding by recommended safety precautions. These would include: having gatherings outdoors and in open spaces and practicing proper social distancing of 6-feet or more. The use of appropriately worn face coverings is recommended for these small group gatherings.
- Considerations will be made for in-person visits by the pastors on a case-by-case basis, keeping in mind recommended safety precautions.
- Guidelines for Faith Formation events with children and youth will be heavily influenced by the practices of the school district.
- In an effort to limit exposure, areas of the church will be isolated as Loving Arms access only. This will include the kitchen as LA prepares meals in a daily basis and we need to limit access to LA staff only.