

Recommendations for Reopening GSLC

This is a living document, meant to be updated and revisited as we move through the stages of this pandemic together. It is meant to be used as a companion document with “GSLC Phased Reopening.” Version 1: Last edited 11/4/2020

Statement of Purpose

We seek to resume meaningful public worship sometime in the fall of 2020 at a time and in ways that enable GSLC to remain a safe space. We will pursue this goal by making decisions that are informed by scripture, by our best understanding of science and data and by guidance from the Massachusetts and Worcester County public health offices. In this document, we have especially been guided by the [MA Checklist for Houses of Worship](#).

Scriptural Principles

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28-31 NIV)

Goals and Actions

Goal Summary:

1. Facilitate social distancing of individuals/family groups.
2. Reduce airborne virus spread
3. Facilitate clean air circulation
4. Minimize surfaces for worshippers and staff to touch
5. Sanitize frequently touched surfaces

6. Facilitate contact tracing
7. Promote hand sanitizing/washing
8. Provide a safe environment for all children and youth.
9. Reframe greeter/usher role for the new protocols
10. Care for the physical and employment safety of staff
11. Host community groups in the building on an appropriate basis.
12. Promote compliance with GSLC's public health protocols
13. Facilitate sustainable oversight of GSLC reopening process, and the production of both in-person and virtual worship services.

1. Facilitate social distancing of individuals/family groups.

Actions:

1. Mark off every other pew to create a minimum of 6 feet of distance between individuals and family groups in the sanctuary.
2. Group each pew into thirds.
 - a. During Phase 2: alternate between using the middle and ends of the pews. Fill maximum of two areas per pew.
 - b. Phase 3: fill maximum of 3.
3. Reduce capacity of sanctuary to 30 people including worship leadership. (Phase 2). Increase to 50 in Phase 3.
4. Individuals not from the same household must physically distance for the duration of their time in the building.
5. Mark 6' foot distances on the Narthex floor as a visual reminder of 6' spacing.
6. Post signs to request no handshaking or hugging
7. Move the sharing of the peace to the end of worship, and encourage other forms of greeting. (eg., wave, hand signs, etc.)
8. If worship team opts to include Children's Sermon, create ways to engage children from safe distance.

2. Reduce airborne virus spread

Actions:

1. During worship services, all persons shall be required to wear a mask. If they are unable to wear a mask, they'll be invited to worship at home. At other times, all persons are required to wear face masks to enter and be in the building, except for:
 - a. Children under 2;
 - b. Persons with asthma or other breathing problems;
 - c. Persons unable to remove their own mask.
2. Provide masks at the door for pick-up by people that arrive without them.
3. Pastor and staff will set an example by wearing masks.
4. Establish new norms regarding participation in the worship service. (i.e.: no singing, communion in seats using kits, etc...]
5. Use music other than congregational or choir singing in the service. Examples:
 - a. Piano/Organ

- b. Solo string instrumentalists. No brass/wind instrumentalists until Phase 4.
6. Encourage people to converse outdoors before and/or after worship.
7. Limit indoor gatherings to 30 minutes.
8. Baptisms and other occasional services may be held separately from regular Sunday morning worship at discretion of pastors. A small number of congregation members can be invited to represent the whole congregation during these rites.

3. Facilitate clean air circulation

Actions:

1. Consult with those with HVAC expertise about how best to set up the sanctuary to facilitate clean air circulation. Options to consider:
 - a. Keep windows and interior/exterior doors open
 - b. In cold weather, keep interior doors open
 - c. If used, fans should blow air OUT of the sanctuary.
 - d. Do not use sanctuary ceiling fans.
 - e. Inspect and maintain clean heating system filters
 - f. Use attic exhaust fan regularly.
2. Use wedges to keep bathroom doors open when the bathrooms are unoccupied.

4. Minimize surfaces for worshippers and staff to touch

Actions:

1. Encourage verbal and symbolic greeting instead of handshakes and hugs. (eg., wave, slight bow, hands pressed together, hand over your heart, other gestures or combinations)
2. Encourage use of online bulletin or printing beforehand. Keep small number of bulletins (10) for those for without electronic access.
3. Offering:
 - a. Encourage online giving.
 - b. Place an offering plate in Narthex where people may place offerings as they enter or depart.
4. Communion:
 - a. Use sealed, prefilled communion cups.
 - b. Worshippers pick up a unit when entering for worship, take communion together in worship (removing mask to eat and drink), and drop the used unit in the waste baskets at the entrances when leaving.
5. Suspend all coffee/tea/snacks/shared food until Phase 4.
6. Restrict operation of church laptop and projector to one person each week.
7. Suspend practice of robing the worship assistant.

5. Sanitize frequently touched surfaces

Actions:

1. Wipe down:
 - a. door handles (interior/exterior)
 - b. pews

- c. toilets / sinks / stalls
 - d. church office and Pastor's office desks and tables
 - e. sanctuary chair backs if used within two days after or before Sunday services
2. Include signage around kitchen and fellowship hall discouraging entry.
 3. Take the water canister out of the bubbler.
 4. Establish a Restroom protocol of one person (or one person with their child) in a restroom at a time. Place a reversible sign on restroom door to indicate when the restroom is occupied.

6. Facilitate contact tracing

Actions:

1. Require advance sign-ups for worship in order to adhere to maximum capacity and enable contact tracing. Ask for contact email or phone number as part of sign-up.
2. Include language about COVID self-screening in sign-up.
3. Usher/greeter to use sign-up sheet to register the attendance of each worshipper entering the building. Leave check-off list in church office after every service.
4. Develop a contact tracing plan in the event that someone with a confirmed case of COVID comes to a church event or enters the church building.

7. Promote hand sanitizing/washing

Actions:

1. Open front doors for Sunday morning entry for ten minutes before the service begins until health of building won't allow (i.e.: when it's below freezing). Keep narthex doors closed; have one usher responsible for touching the door handle to admit people. Invite people to use hand sanitizer as they enter.
2. Keep wall mounted hand sanitizers full and operational.
3. Place bottles of sanitizer at various other spots throughout the building
4. Place signs encouraging good hand washing hygiene in restrooms

8. Provide a safe environment for all children and youth.

Actions:

1. Keep nursery closed until Phase 3. At Phase 3, interview parents (formally or informally) to see if they will bring small children and wish nursery service. If Shell is willing to return from furlough, resume nursery at this time.
2. Suspend in-person faith formation programs until Phase 3 at the earliest. Post-nursery age children remain with parents in service. When Sunday School resumes, train adult volunteers and teachers in safety protocols.
3. TAGS will not utilize the TAGS Room until public health officials no longer require social distancing.
4. Adhere to sanitizing protocol for nursery and Sunday school spaces, especially for common toys and shared surfaces. Remove most of the toys to enable more effective cleaning protocols.

9. Reframe greeter/usher role for the new protocols

Actions:

1. Greeter/usher will be trained for new protocols in advance of Phase 2.
2. Use front entrance as single point of entry.
 - a. Mark other doors with signs that label them as exit doors.
 - b. Use fellowship hall as waiting area if necessary on bad weather days.
 - c. Mark floor with 6' markers to help people maintain distance.
 - d. Have Daily Self-Screen sign posted by entry.
3. Have greeter meet people by Tree of Life to sign them in and ask about their self-assessment.
 - a. "Welcome to worship – we're glad you've come."
 - b. "Did you sign up to come to this service?"
 - i. If no-- refer to the self-screen sign: "Can you answer 'no' to all of these questions?"
 - ii. "Do you have any announcements or prayer requests I can convey to the Worship Leader?" (make a note if yes!)
 - iii. Invite them to use hand sanitizer
 - iv. Ask them to pick up a mask if they are without.
 - v. Invite them to pick up a communion kit.
4. Another usher/greeter will open narthex doors and seat worshippers in pews in the sanctuary:
 - a. Welcome them again – "We're glad you've come."
 - b. "Thank you for helping us keep this a safe space for everyone."
5. At the end of worship, ask worshippers to move directly outdoors without gathering in the Narthex. Encourage people to exit via the side doors as they're able.
6. [If the need arises: Dismiss worshippers by person or family group starting from the back of the sanctuary and paced to enable 6' distancing. i.e., those seated in front will leave the sanctuary last.]

10. Care for the physical and employment safety of staff

Actions

1. Review or adopt a clearly stated policy that:
 - a. staff's employment is not endangered if they stay home because they are not feeling well or have been exposed to someone sick.
 - b. staff may work with pastors and council to find alternative ways of discharging their responsibilities if they are not comfortable coming to Sunday morning worship.
2. Ensure mask use for all staff in communal spaces.
3. Continue to maintain sign-in sheet at church entrance.
4. Staff offices will be closed to non-staff members unless by explicit invitation of the staff member.
5. Reimagine staff roles within their capabilities, these reopening recommendations, and physical comfort level of each staff member.
6. Employ mutual ministry committees to keep pulse on sustainability of workload and responsibilities for staff members.

11. Host community groups in the building on an appropriate basis.

Actions:

1. Grant no approval to new community groups requesting to meet in the building.
2. Review the expected attendance and the space needs of community groups that were meeting in the building pre-pandemic.
 - a. Alcoholics Anonymous (several groups)
 - b. BSA Scout Troop 11
 - c. Early Intervention
 - d. Parkinson Support Group
3. Determine on a case-by-case basis the timing and under what conditions the groups listed above may resume meeting in the building.
 - a. Reopening Team initiates the process of reopening to outside groups
 - b. Staff gathers information about the needs of each group and tasks appropriate people with securing the following agreement.
4. Secure agreement on mask wearing, contact tracing plan, social distancing, limiting meeting to assigned spaces, cleaning and sanitizing protocols for any community group meeting in the building.
5. Schedule groups in such a way that no two groups are sharing the building simultaneously.

12. Promote compliance with GSLC's public health protocols

Actions:

1. Post signage of GSLC public health protocols at the entrances.
2. Post public health protocols on the GSLC website and Facebook page.
3. Create overflow space if attendees and worship leadership exceed 30 people in the church nursery (capacity: 3 people). Clearly communicate capacity limits to ushers. Allow them to make determination of when they must invite people to return another time.
4. Any individual refusing to follow the protocols will be asked to leave the building by greeter/usher, and invited to participate online. Provide ushers with resources for those invitations (i.e.: flyers).
5. If the individual still refuses to comply or to leave the building, the usher/greeter will consult with the pastor. Depending on the degree of disruption, the noncompliant individual may be directed to the overflow room. If the degree of disruption is severe, the service will immediately be brought to an end and those in attendance must leave the church property. In this event, the reopening team will reevaluate our approach to noncompliance.
6. Secure legal counsel as to GSLC's liability if sued by someone who becomes infected after attending a service or event at the church.

13. Facilitate sustainable oversight of GSLC reopening process, and the production of both in-person and virtual worship services.

Actions

1. Create a Reopening Team reporting to Council thus relieving Council from ongoing management of reopening.
2. Reopening Team will
 - a. Coordinate reopening guidelines and protocols between the pastors, staff, and congregation, and outside organizations
 - b. Oversee ongoing communication to congregation and the public regarding reopening protocols
 - c. Oversee and enforce compliance with GSLC reopening protocols,
 - d. Recommend changes to guidelines and protocols as health environment changes.