



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



Grace Lutheran Church, Hastings, Michigan

COVID-19 Response Debriefing – “After Report”

Approved by Congregation Council October 20, 2020

Grace's Response to COVID-19 – A Summary of Committees' and Administration's Notes

Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued a State of Emergency on Friday, March 13, 2020 as COVID-19 cases began to increase in Michigan. Grace leadership met and determined immediate actions to take and also worked toward a longer-term response. (See attached letter to congregation from April 2020 Gracegram.)

Council approved the following motions in regard to responding to COVID-19:

- 3/13 - Motion to cancel "on-site worship and meetings" until at least Palm Sunday
- 3/24 - Motion to extend "no on-site worship and meetings" through 5/10 (with possibility of opening sooner if public health and Governor say OK)
- 3/27 - Motion to add ACH as an option for people to donate regular and special offerings
- 3/30-4/1 - Motion to authorize Executive Committee to review all budgeted and non-budgeted expenditure requests to the end of Grace Fiscal Year (7/31/2020)
- 5/19 – Motion that Grace leadership follow State of Michigan stay-at-home orders and North/West Lower Michigan Synod safety precautions guidance regarding on-site worship and meetings throughout the Covid-19 crisis
- 5/19 - Motion to have church on May 31st at 8 o'clock only depending the lifting of the governor's stay-at-home order
- 5/19 – Motion, in the event the stay at home is extended on May 28th, we come back as a council and vote on whether we continue off site virtual worship or have onsite
- 7/14 - Motion to approve proposed policy for electronic voting by Council
- 8/25 - Motion to take all the "high-risk/low-risk" signage off the bathroom doors. Restrooms will still be cleaned using CDC cleaning procedures and a sign will be posted
- 10/20 – Motion to approve "After Report" and make available to the congregation

Because we were not prepared for a pandemic and had to respond "on the fly," Grace leadership decided that lessons learned during this time would help guide future responses to long-term and short-term emergencies. Leadership posed the following questions to committee chairs and the parish administrator:

1. What were the changes to ministries that worked well during our response?
2. What were issues and challenges to ministries that need to be worked on?
3. What ideas and opportunities for new ways of ministry were discovered?
4. How can Grace leadership help make ministry happen?

For the sake of transparency, all responses received are attached to this summary.

Question 1: What were the changes to ministries that worked well during our response?

- Grace leadership determined where costs could be cut and authorized the Executive Committee to review all expenditure requests before approval. Our congregation responded to the reality that bills still needed to be paid and gave their offerings faithfully (dropping off, mailing in, using ACH).
- Our zoned HVAC system allowed for shutting off unused areas.
- Administrative duties were divided between the Parish Administrator and Pastor. (This may not have been possible if Pastor Ken did not have the skills and knowledge needed to complete some administrative tasks.)
- Due to reduced use of the building during business hours, it was not necessary for the Parish Administrator to return to work at her full schedule. She is currently (as of late September) working 16 hours a week rather than her former 20, which is saving us money.
- Volunteers helped with worship art and sanitizing public areas.
- Although many Outreach activities had to be cancelled, we were still able to collect for the ELCA World Hunger appeal with our Lenten coin boxes.
- Worship Committee maintained contact via text as they planned for when on-site worship would resume.
- When bell choir resumed in the fall, they met in smaller groups, distancing themselves during rehearsals, and they are trying bell trees to minimize the number of ringers needed for a song.
- There was increased use of Shepherds and technology (TV, radio, Facebook, our webpage) to communicate to congregation.
- Groups used a free conference line for meetings and obtained a YouTube channel for streaming worship.
- The youth were able to safely help with a property clean-up day and the curbside flower sale.

Question 2: What were issues and challenges to ministries that need to be worked on (or have been addressed)?

- One staff evaluation remained pending at the beginning of the COVID crisis (but has since been completed).
- The Stewardship Committee proposed a “lean” budget for 2020-2021, reducing our spending as much as practical while still maintaining appropriate budgets for key ministries and functions (about an 8% reduction in the overall budget).
- The free conference line is an out-of-state number, meaning those with landlines or those who do not have unlimited minutes on their phone plan would be charged.
- The conference line and use of the laptop gave poor sound quality for worship (improved by having a YouTube channel and using software to improve production)
- Only one worship time was offered at first (later, the YouTube channel allowed for “attending” worship at any time; eventually both worship times were re-opened for on-site attendance).
- Some people not involved with the Worship Committee expressed their desire to return to worship/communion sooner than the Committee was ready to recommend. (They discussed their concerns with Pastor Ken.)
- Communion to homebound could not happen during the shut-down.
- Plans for choir to sing in Lent and on Easter had to be scrapped due to the pandemic. It is not prudent to sing in group settings currently, which could last quite a long time.
- Social Activities Committee had to cancel their fellowship events for the balance of the fiscal year.
- Over one-half of the Congregational Care Committee’s members do not use technology (text, email, internet), which made not being able to meet in person challenging to internal communications. This begged the question as to what extent does Grace’s membership use technology.
- The Property Committee has not had a meeting since January 2020. (However, the committee is working on scheduling a meeting as well as a fall clean-up.)
- The Youth and Family Committee did not have a call tree or email distribution list, nor were on-line interface opportunities used to promote and maintain contact.

Question 3: What ideas and opportunities for new ways of ministry were discovered?

- Choose music that is familiar, or very easily learned, for the online worship experience (Minister of Music is doing this).
- Keep the streaming option for those who want to worship remotely
- Keep the conference line for those who want to attend meetings remotely
- There was increased use of US mail to send Easter and Thinking-of-You cards to members (primarily done by Shepherds but also done by others).
- Use Zoom or other virtual forums to reach our youth.
- Become involved with Synod youth initiatives and calls.

Question 4: How can Grace leadership help make ministry happen?

- Technology - Advocate for broadband technology to be delivered/more accessible to rural areas
- Technology – Upgrade the church’s computer system to accommodate holding video calls (e.g., Zoom) versus conference calls. (The Free Conference Call line we have allows for video conferencing. People may not be aware of that.)
- Technology - Possibly have more than 1 conference line for when multiple meetings occur at the same time
- Technology - Look into an all-call message system (similar to what the schools do) for getting quick notices out to members.
- Safety Team – devise a preparedness manual for responding to short-term and long-term emergencies
- Youth - Organize some conference-level planning sessions with other ELCA leadership with our Synod for youth.

Attachments



How is Grace responding to the coronavirus pandemic?

When the State of Michigan announced its first cases of coronavirus, Pastor Ken, Grace President Chris Bush, and Safety Team Lead Steve Wales conferred on making sure Grace, as an institution and as a community, had a plan to help slow the spread of the virus. They outlined what they felt was necessary, checked with the rest of the Executive Committee, to reach consensus, and then brought the plan to Congregation Council. On March 13, Congregation Council approved the motion to cancel worship services until Palm Sunday (re-evaluating the situation before resuming normal practice) and to modify other events originally scheduled for that timeframe.

Grace leadership is looking to the state and federal health authorities for updates and guidance: [mi.gov/coronavirus](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus) and [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). (We have also reviewed recommendations from the ELCA and our Synod.) As the guidance evolves, Grace leadership will update the membership through the many channels we use for communicating.

As an institution, we are keeping normal weekday business hours (Monday-Thursday, 9-3). **If you choose to come into the church, please practice “social distancing” (at least 6 feet between you and another person) and other health safety measures.** If you want to bring in food for the Food Box, you are welcome to bring it during that time and it will get to Barry County Cares. If you want to drop off your offering during those hours, there will be an offering plate set near the office that will be monitored and emptied throughout the day. Alternatively, you can mail your check offering to the church (please do not mail cash).

As a community of faith,

- We will hold a **modified worship service by phone on Sundays at 10:45 am beginning on March 22nd**, using a conference line so that all who want to participate can do so. (Note, no 8 AM worship; early-service folks are asked to dial in at 10:45 too.) This worship service will not have the communion liturgy; Pastor Ken is willing to make an appointment with you if you would like communion. To access the conference line, do these steps:
 1. The phone number is (605).313.5981. This conference call is not a local call, so it could cost you long distant rates.
 2. After you dial the phone number, you will be asked to enter your access code, which is 772653 followed by the (#) key.
 3. Pastor Ken or another leader will be the host, so you don't have to do anything else – your line should automatically connect.

There is a large print rendering of the phone number and access code on the back of this page.
- We will conduct a **Bible study on Wednesday nights at 7 pm beginning on March 25th** using a conference line so that all who want to participate can do so. To access the conference line, do these steps above or on the next page at the top or bottom of the page.

1. The phone number is (605).313.5981. This conference call is not a local call, so it could cost you long distant rates.
 2. After you dial the phone number, you will be asked to enter your access code, which is 772653 followed by the (#) key.
 3. Pastor Ken or another leader will be the host, so you don't have to do anything else – your line should automatically connect.
- We will **post the Sunday morning worship and Bible studies you can use at home to our website and Facebook page.** We will also send them by email, if requested. Please make sure we have your correct email address.

As members of not only the Grace community but the human family, there are practical steps each of us can take to keep ourselves and others as healthy as possible for as long as possible:

- **If you are sick (including cold or flu) or feeling under the weather, stay home.** Your health may be vulnerable, so staying home and resting is the best thing for you. And, if you do have a bug, you will not be spreading it to others. If you are concerned about your health, contact your doctor by phone or your healthcare portal.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Use a tissue or your sleeve. Also, try not to touch your face, particularly your eyes, nose, or mouth. Consider keeping a tissue handy for itches and sniffles, since it can be challenging not to touch your face!
- **Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently.** This is especially true in public areas but also at home. Remember the “Happy Birthday” song (sing it twice while washing).
- **Have a plan ready if you have to stay home for an extended period.** Do you have enough people food, pet food, and household supplies if you need to stay at home for two weeks? Stay in touch via phone, text, Skype, social media, and email. We have asked your Shepherds to call you every week during this time, but do not hesitate to call them or the church if you need to.
- **Do not panic but have resolve.** This will be a difficult time and is likely scaring some people. By taking steps to protect yourself and others, you are empowering yourself. This disruption to our lives will pass more smoothly if we work together. This crisis is not a blessing, but we can be a blessing to each other during this time.

We will continue to keep you updated about Grace's response to the coronavirus through Facebook, media outlets, the Shepherds, and other means.

May our all-loving God grant you peace during this time. *Chris*

Grace Conference Line for worship, Bible studies:

1. Dial (605).313.5981.
2. Enter access code: 772653, followed by the (#) key.

PROPERTY COMMITTEE

- Property committee has not had a meeting since the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. Our last meeting was January of 2020.
- Property committee has been attending to any property needs as individuals, wearing masks and social distancing.
- We are in the process of picking a date, this September for our first meeting since the pandemic. The members attending will wear masks and social distance.

PARISH ADMINISTRATOR

With the stay at home order invoked on March 16, 2020, I came in only on Wednesdays for one half day of office work. This meant finishing what Pastor Ken did/could not, such as payroll submission, posting website information, recording donations, printing and distributing newsletter, etc.

This continued until the order was lifted and when I came back 4 days at 5 hours per day, it was evident that 20 hours was not needed each week while nothing was running at the church. I decreased my time to 4 hours, 4 days a week and completed all tasks that did come across the office desk.

So far, I have been able to cover needed tasks in 16 hours per week. When events and activities pick back up and traffic in the building increases, I can go back to 20 hour/week.

One thing that should be noted here: because Pastor Ken has the skills and knowledge to complete my normal work, was I able to stay at home as much as I did. Normal office tasks did not suffer. This also helped during my recent illness. Kudos to PK2 !

Wendy Kimble

Parish Administrator

PRESIDENT

1. What worked well:
 - a. Use of Shepherds to communicate to congregation
 - b. Use of technology (FB page, TV, radio) to communicate to congregation
 - c. Ability to get a free conference line and YouTube channel
 - d. Office coverage handled by Pastor and Parish Administrator
 - e. Zoned HVAC system allowed for shutting off unused areas
 - f. Offerings could be dropped off or mailed in; ACH set up
 - g. Volunteers to help in building for worship art, sanitizing
2. Issues and challenges:
 - a. Remote worshipping
 - i. Sound quality
 - ii. Only offered at 1 service time (10:45)
 - b. Remote meetings
 - i. Conference line is an out-of-state number, meaning those with landlines or those who do not have unlimited minutes on their phone would be charged
 - c. Conference line had better audio quality if accessing the line through computer or phone app; direct-dial had poor sound quality for some
 - d. Determining when and how to re-engage on-site worship
 - e. Many activities that had been planned had to be cancelled/postponed, requiring some follow-up steps (e.g. flower sale, pasty sale)
 - f. Communion to homebound could not happen
3. Ideas/opportunities for new ministry:
 - a. Keep conference line and live-stream for those who want to worship remotely
 - i. Reconfigure video and audio feed to look more “professional” and improve picture and sound quality
 - b. Keep conference line for those who want to attend meetings remotely
 - c. Advocate for broadband technology to be delivered/more accessible to rural areas
4. How can Grace leadership facilitate new ministries:
 - a. Safety Team – devise a preparedness manual for responding to emergencies (short-term such as tornadoes, fire, shooter; long-term such as pandemic, building not usable)
 - b. Possibly have more than 1 conference line when multiple meetings occur at same time

CONGREGATIONAL CARE COMMITTEE

The COVID-19 Pandemic caused the Congregational Care Committee to communicate by phone more often. Because communication by phone with Grace members is our primary activity, it worked well. We did not have to change anything in this regard except increase frequency.

The biggest Issue and challenge for the Congregational Care Committee was trying to meet (our scheduled meeting of 5/4/20 was canceled). Over half of our committee members do not use technology. They do not email or text. They would not know how or have the equipment (computer/internet) to use ZOOM or some other application in order to meet. Probably, they are representative of the people of the congregation. How many Grace members were even able to join worship by teleconference or livestreaming? The lack of technology is certainly an issue.

New ways of ministry used by several members of the Congregational Care Committee weren't really new at all. Many used the "good old US mail" to send Easter and Thinking of You cards to members on their Shepherd's lists.

Short of having an all-call message system to every Grace home like the schools have, the ministry of the Congregational Care Committee does not at this time have any new ideas to help make our ministry happen faster or better. Like with everything else, members can even opt out of answering their phones "live" and have their calls go to messaging. Or some don't even have messaging capabilities. Communication is the key! We try to do the best we can, and through this pandemic, we've done it often!

YOUTH AND FAMILY COMMITTEE

a. What were changes to their ministries that worked well?

- * Mission ministry for spring upkeep of church property (work day)
- * Curbside flower sale
- * Committee member contact via phone with some families with youth members
- * Pastoral ministry by phone

b. What were issues and challenges to their ministries that need to be worked on?

- * No call tree or email distribution, no chat or on-line interface with Grace youth to help promote or maintain contact
- * No access to public facilities or gathering spaces

c. What ideas/opportunities for new ways of ministry were discovered?

- * Could have used Zoom or other virtual forums to reach our youth

* Found several other youth initiatives occurring within our Synod which we could have connected with, including Living Water Ministries "Campfires".

NOTE: There is no need to make this a disaster plan. An existing exchange program/virtual connection would have been useful.

d. How can the Executive and Council help them, what do they need to make the ministry happen?

* Organizing some conference-level planning sessions with other ELCA leadership within our Synod.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE

1. What were changes to the committee's ministries that worked well?

Use of email and conference call meetings took the place of face-to-face meetings.

2. What were issues and challenges to the committee's ministries that needed to be addressed?

Most of the Outreach Committee's projects/events by the very nature of "outreach" are in-person, face-to-face events. The projects/events were therefore severely impacted by the "stay-at-home" and "personal distancing" requirements of the community response to the pandemic. We cancelled the Good Friday Cross Walk and the planned Auto Show/BBQ scheduled for the end of July. The annual project to support Barry County Cares/Hastings Food Pantry will be rescheduled from the usual June activity to sometime this fall.

3. What ideas/opportunities for new ways of ministry were discovered?

None that we could recall.

4. How can the Executive Committee and church council help your committee?
What needs to be addressed to make ministry happen?

Under the specific restrictions associated with the pandemic it would be quite difficult if not impossible to actually make outreach ministry happen in any meaningful way. However, we do believe that it would be advisable for the Executive Committee and/or the Church Council to assess the possibility of upgrading the church's computer system to accommodate the opportunity for holding Zoom meeting vs. conference calls. Any improvement to upgrading the sound system and additional equipment necessary for posting the worship services on You Tube or some similar website would also be worth researching.

EXCERPTS FROM THE 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

From Minister of Music's report:

- Admittedly, COVID-19 has created major changes in how we live and serve together. The most obvious is that it is not prudent to sing in group settings currently, which could, unfortunately, last quite a long time.
- I had plans for choir to sing in Lent and on Easter, which had to be scrapped due to the pandemic.
- Given that we will not be singing in worship for the indefinite future, I will be sure to choose music that is familiar, or very easily learned, for the online worship experience.

From President's report:

- As the coronavirus pandemic forced us to stay home from worship and started to impact our economy, Grace leadership determined where costs could be cut and authorized the Executive Committee to review all expenditure requests before approval. Our congregation responded to the reality that bills still needed to be paid and gave their offerings faithfully, whether by mailing in or dropping off their donations or using the ACH option we began this year.
- Several of us have likely learned new computer skills as we embarked on live-streaming our worship service.

From Vice President's report:

- At the time of submission of this report one [staff] evaluation remains pending due to interruption in process by Covid-19.

From Stewardship Committee's report:

- While we were on track to return to a balanced budget within the next 12-24 months, the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-10 pandemic drove a desire to reduce our spending as much as practical, while still maintaining appropriate budget for key ministries and functions. Based on projections at current levels of giving, this budget proposal represents a balanced budget over the course of the 2020/2021 fiscal year. Staying within this budget will be a challenge. We are relying on the congregation to continue supporting the church as you have despite these uncertain times, and we will be asking our committees and leaders to find creative ways to maintain effective ministries with less resources. I believe that GLC is up to this challenge, and that we will be able to position our church to thrive, even during periods of uncertainty and hardship.

From Social Activities Committee's report:

- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic stay-at-home orders, we canceled our fellowship events for the balance of the fiscal year [starting March]. We hope to begin our social events as the pandemic eases and makes it safe for us all to stay healthy while socializing.

From Worship Committee's report:

- We have not been able to meet since January but we keep in contact via text as a group and I'm so very grateful that we all keep involved. In the last few months we have had quite a bit of contact as we have helped in the planning process for when the church reopens. Lots of decisions to be made in order to do this safely for all of our worshipers!

From Bell Choir's report:

- Even with Stay-at-Home orders that began in March, I have been reviewing music, writing grants, purchasing items with grant money, marking music, organizing equipment, and contacting each bell member to keep relationships strong.
- Plans have been made to have smaller groups for physical distancing and trying some bell tree options. We are eager to return to praising God with bells and chimes.