



Funerals and Memorial Services in the Time of COVID-19

Zion Lutheran Church
Guidance for Families
Updated April 2021

One of the hardest things about the 2020-2021 global pandemic has been its impact on being present for one another in times of illness and grief. Zion has known loss during this time and it has been hard to be away from friends and neighbors in pain. As we prepare for our return to in-building worship and ministry, we hope these guidelines will help families be safe and feel supported after the death of a loved one. Please note that the words “funeral” and “memorial service” are used interchangeably in this document.

We know that the pandemic continues to be an ever-changing landscape as vaccination rates and new variants wrestle for dominance.

Our general rule of thumb for all midweek services is that whatever precautions and protocols are in place on the previous Sunday are also in place throughout the following week.

Guidelines/protocols related to the building in general:

1. The **basic protocols** for building safety remain: all people in the building are masked and remain safely distant (6 feet from one another); frequent handwashing is encouraged and touchless hand sanitizer stations are readily available; anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or a recent exposure is asked to refrain from entering.

Additional Guidelines related to all worship services:

1. Our worship services are designed to be approximately 30 – 35 minutes in **length**. At this time, we do not have integrated capabilities for live-streaming in our sound system.

2. Our current **capacity** limit is 75 – 80 people in the sanctuary. For memorial services, we recommend against placing a notice in the paper and instead encourage direct invitations to friends, neighbors, and coworkers. This protects against the uncomfortable circumstance of having to turn anyone away who might come to pay their respects and support the family.
3. Limited (1 – 2 hymns) quiet, masked **singing** may be allowed.
4. Only one **speaker**, other than the pastor, may have access to the podium/lectern. For funerals, families are welcome to choose a reader. If additional members would like to share memories and stories, these are best offered at the cemetery or in another outdoor or off-site setting where there are not limitations.
5. To reduce congregating in small indoor spaces, the **doors typically open** about 15 minutes before any worship service begins. Worshipers are welcome to gather in the parking lot prior to this time. For funerals, the doors will open for family 30 minutes before the service to allow for plenty of time to be seated in the family section.

Additional Guidelines related specifically to funerals and memorial services:

1. We recommend choosing a **Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday** for your gathering if at all possible to allow for ample time to clean before/after Sunday worship. All dates need to be confirmed with the church office before making that information known to family members and friends.
2. As of now, Zion is unable to offer any **food** or **beverage** options before or after the funeral. We also do not have sufficient space to safely allow for **visitation** before the service or a **receiving line** after the service. We know these can be important aspects of community and healing after a death. We will continue to review this policy and make updates when circumstances change. In the meantime, we recommend that families wishing to gather in these ways, look for ways to do so in another location.
3. **Family seating** will be blocked off in the sanctuary and, if desired, within this area, family members are welcome to sit closer than the 6-foot distance allowed in other places in the building. For friends and other worshipers, Zion ushers and/or funeral home staff members will help people select seats at that 6-foot safe distance.
4. If planning a memorial service for a date several weeks/months **in advance**, we encourage families to make a **back-up plan** for an outdoor or virtual space. We know that pandemic circumstances can change quickly and if the building is closed the Sunday before the scheduled gathering, we would not be able to host the service in the sanctuary.
5. **Clergy and parish musicians** need the ability to make decisions about public, in-person worship leadership that allow them to care for their own health and safety, as well as that of their families and communities. They, therefore, have the freedom to withdraw from any worship situation in which they do not feel confident of existing safety measures.