

WORSHIP PROPOSAL



Background

In 2016, Lombard CRC committed to “universal design” in order to make worship accessible to persons with disabilities and other health concerns. One example of this was creation of multisensory activity bags; another example was the addition of icons to worship handouts. The past two years slowed our progress in this regard, of course, as attention shifted to address the pandemic.

While the omicron surge is beginning to decline, concurrently, there is the rise of an even more contagious version of omicron (BA.2) referred to as a “stealth” subvariant. Some medical experts believe this is “certainly not” the last variant we will face, so amid the unknown, it would be wise to plan with caution and contingency, in effort to care for the most vulnerable.

Objective

To provide an accessible, inclusive worship space for vulnerable LCRC congregants, their caretakers, the elderly, and other high-risk individuals — easing concerns of anxious congregants and creating a bridge for online worshipers to rejoin in-person.

Concept

The fireside room could be used as a safe space for high-risk congregants, their family members, and caretakers.

Video of the service would be streamed into the fellowship hall. Careful attention would be given to EQ and overall sound quality of streamed video, an improvement that will benefit both fireside and online worshipers. At the end, live piano would be played for the postlude or a time of silent prayer.

The side door could be used for those concerned about a crowded entrance/exit, such as the narthex.

Rather than creating division, the alternative space will provide a compassionate option for vulnerable individuals and their loved ones who long for greater community and participation. Inclusion would be twofold: (1) creation of safe space in LCRC community worship when county transmission is high and medium; (2) reintegration into the sanctuary when transmission is low.

Protocols

- Social distancing will be observed in the fellowship hall.
 - 3 tables would be set up for families.
 - 10-12 chairs would set up in pairs for individuals/couples.
- Participation would include quiet singing and/or personal reflection.
- Should masks be eventually removed in the sanctuary (e.g., after singing), this space would retain mask adherence.
- Reminders of safe covid practices would be posted/distributed in the room.
- Multiple air filters would be placed in this room, along with opening side windows — which would benefit not only the vulnerable during worship but increase the safety of other congregants eating and drinking coffee after service.
- Signups could be added at a later point if numbers exceed safe room capacity.
- Objective measurements (e.g., “low” transmission according to CDC for 4 continuous weeks) would suspend the fireside experience, which would only resume when transmission is medium or high.
- Additional advice could be gathered from the CRC Disability Concerns office (<https://www.crcna.org/disability>).

Expectations

- Low numbers are to be expected (estimated 5-20 people), since most vulnerable congregants will stay home and watch online; however, this space provides a “bridge” for individuals who desire community and additional participation.
- A small number of congregants may select the fireside room due to unspoken worries or private health conditions (e.g., how some disabilities are not always spoken about publicly: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/21/opinion/sunday/becoming-disabled.html>)
- This space could be highlighted on the church website, for anyone seeking a social-distanced worship environment, as such demand will continue for the foreseeable future.

Goals

- Advance LCRC’s commitment to universal design in worship.
- Retain vulnerable families within the existing congregation.
- Reach visitors seeking precautionary worship venues (which is possible if properly promoted on church website, social media channels, and Facebook and Google ads).