

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:18-19).

Sisters and brothers: after many long months, it has come time to make this announcement. After consideration of the medical situation in Cass County area (yes, I know that some of you, like me, are actually residents of Crow Wing County, which does have a few more cases, but also greater population) and updated plans from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Governor's office, our church council has decided to resume in-person worship at First Lutheran Church on July 12, 2020. I know that this is news that many, myself included, have been longing to hear. Undoubtedly, there are also those who will question this decision, saying that it is too early, that COVID-19 is still out there and still a danger until appropriate remedies can be found and developed. We (I and the Smart Team) begin with the following considerations:

1. COVID-19 is real, and, especially given certain co-morbidities, can be quite dangerous. One of the primary co-morbidities seems to be age. Recommendations continue to be that those over a certain age (recent suggestions indicate the age of 60) are more likely to be affected and should be cautious about gathering in public. Other co-morbidities (but, by no means an exhaustive list) are having a compromised immune system (due to a variety of medical conditions, perhaps most notably cancer treatments), diabetes, and obesity.
2. COVID-19 is going to be around for some time. Realistic estimates (coming out of the medical community) point to initial vaccine trials beginning in the fall, and some availability for high-risk groups during the winter months.
3. There is physical risk involved in gathering together because of COVID-19, not only for our self, but also those around us if we are carriers (either symptomatic or asymptomatic).
4. Spiritual (and Social and Emotional) Health are important. Isolation harms these very important factors of holistic health. Community and Word and Sacrament are important factors in our Spiritual Health.
5. Worship exists in a variety of forms; none are inherently better or worse than others, but given local circumstances, some of these may be more effective than others.
6. There is disparity in our community in terms of technological access. And our physical plot and internal technology would make doing "parking lot" or "outdoor" services impractical to impossible.

With these as a basis of our thought process, the following recommendations and requirements from the Smart Team have been made and will be enforced:

1. We will continue to offer on-line worship as we have been during our period of closure to in-person activities. We continue to work on ways to improve and diversify this worship, and that will continue as we move forward. One aspect of on-line worship of which everyone needs to be aware: Our on-line worship will be a recording of the in-person worship service. While the focus will primarily be on the chancel, by coming to in-person worship, you hereby give your consent to have your likeness (most likely the back of your head) be included in the video; you will not be identified unless you are serving as a worship leader. If you do not give your consent, the easiest way to solve this is to participate in on-line worship rather than in-person worship; otherwise you can request that the ushers seat you in the back of the sanctuary. For those of you who choose to continue to participate in on-line worship: because we are going to be recording the actual worship service, the recorded version will not be available until Sunday evening or Monday morning. (One area we are possibly looking at changing is to do the on-line worship as a zoom meeting.)
2. Educational events such as Sunday Morning Bible Study and Wednesday morning Text Study will be hybrid—we'll have an in-person gatherings meeting CDC and restrictions indicated below for building use/worship, and we will also still do them as a zoom meeting for those who choose to participate

through that medium. Fall educational activities will be decided upon once the school district makes decisions and we get closer to that time.

3. For those of you who choose to attend in-person worship:
 - a. If you are symptomatic (Fever or chills, Cough, Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, Fatigue, Muscle or body aches, Headache, New loss of taste or smell, Sore throat, Congestion or runny nose, Nausea or vomiting, Diarrhea) STAY HOME and participate in on-line worship (and probably contact your doctor's office to get tested).
 - b. Wearing a mask is required. For those of you who don't have one, masks will be provided. The requirement of masks is an expression of us loving our neighbor; if you are infected and asymptomatic (which is not uncommon with COVID) wearing a mask reduces the chance that you'll spread COVID; if this is combined with those who may become infected also wearing a mask, infection risk is significantly reduced—but is still possible (all risk cannot be eliminated, but we should do our best to eliminate what we can).
 - c. Use hand sanitizer upon entering and exiting the building.
 - d. Do not congregate in the narthex, hallways or bathrooms. Bathroom occupancy is limited to one person at a time with handwashing/towel use requirements—see postings in bathrooms (please use the bathroom prior to coming); water fountain use is also prohibited (they'll be blocked off).
 - e. Do not go upstairs or downstairs. These areas are closed. If you enter through the rear handicap accessible door, you must use the elevator to get to floor 1 (only go to floor 1).
 - f. When you enter, proceed directly to the ushers/greeters who will seat you in the Sanctuary. Physical distancing will be enforced (you'll be seated in a particular pew based upon entrance time, and pews will be blocked off). Only enter and leave the Sanctuary (you'll be directed by usher's anyway) through the middle door; use of others is restricted to emergency use only.
 - g. Pastor Jacob will enter the chancel through the side door and will not be milling in the narthex prior to the service. If you feel a need to see him, enter through the side door when you arrive.
 - h. Children are to remain with their family throughout the worship service. There are no busy bags and there will not be children's sermons (a "family conversation guide" will be made available on-line at the beginning of Pastor Jacob's posted sermon manuscript—see 1stluth.org/sermons—for families to have the conversation that would have been the basis of the children's sermon); the reasons for this change because gathering with the children up front would violate physical distancing rules, and as an attempt to trim the worship time.
 - i. While there are hymns and congregational responses in the service, you are asked to silently participate in these and meditate upon them as the Worship Team does the "Congregation" parts.
 - j. There will be no fellowship time, nor will any food or coffee be served until further notice. (This is a restriction that will probably last longer than some of the others.)
 - k. Communion will take place at the end of the worship service. You will be dismissed by the usher. Please follow the blue arrows & x's toward the door which you entered, maintaining physical distancing (the arrows and x's are sufficient for this), to receive the elements. For the time being, we are using a pre-packaged form that is wafer (not gluten free) and grape juice; if you are on gluten free restrictions, remember that the Lutheran tradition teaches that Christ is fully present in one kind. Further instructions will be provided during worship. (You may, obviously, remove your mask for consuming the elements.)
 - l. After communion, continue proceeding directly out of the building.

In Christ's Peace

Pastor Jacob and the COVID Smart Team (Jan Brasel, Denice Smith, Paul Person, Anne Holm & Pastor Jacob)