

May 18, 2021

A letter from the Pastor,

These past fifteen months of COVID-19 have been a struggle that has affected each one of us one way or another: sickness, death, loss of jobs and businesses, quarantine, inability to see loved ones, loss of travel, mandates to wear mask, frequently washing hands, wearing gloves, social distancing, limiting occupancy in buildings, school closures and distance learning, working from home, canceling events, and a slew of numerous other changes in our lifestyle. Through it all God has walked beside us every step of the way and is now leading out.

The pandemic affected the Church also, and as you know, many changes to the way we normally do ministry took place. We had to think creatively of how to do ministry in this new context. I am thankful to be able to say that we never missed a Sunday worship service – we actually added a few extra worship services, and as far as I know, no transmission of the disease has been traced to a church function at St. Paul Lutheran. Early in the pandemic I encouraged people to stay home and listen on the radio or livestream until we learned more about the disease. Since May 2020 more and more people have slowly been coming back to in-person worship.

Now it is time to make changes once again. The pandemic is still ongoing. People are still contracting COVID-19 and getting sick, going to the hospital, and dying, but the widespread threat is decreasing because more and more people are being immunized against the virus. The pandemic is not over -- we are not out of the woods, yet, but we can see daylight, and so the church is moving to ease up on the safety precautions that were put in place during the pandemic. On May 11, 2021, the Church Council approved a motion to make the changes that will begin on May 29.

**Worship** – In-person occupancy will not be limited and the signs on the pews will be removed. Masks are recommended but are optional. The format of the worship bulletin will remain the same, and bulletins will still be available outside the Ed Building doors and on the website for those who choose to listen on the radio and internet. Offering plates and attendance cards will remain at the entrance ways to the church. No-contact Passing of the Peace will be included in the service. Communion will be offered each week using individual cups, and the drive-thru communion will continue until the Eucharistic Ministry is functioning again (possibly in June). Children will be invited to come forward for the Children’s Sermon. Acolytes will be able to be a part of the service once a schedule is put together. The Saturday service will need to be moved out of the Fellowship Hall due to other events using that space. The Chapel has limited space and would be crowded for the number of people currently attending; therefore, the service will be held in the Sanctuary for the time being beginning on May 29.

**Funeral and Memorial Services** – Occupancy will not be limited, masks will be optional, and the Servant Ministry will be able to host food and fellowship gatherings for the families and guests.

**Weddings** -- Occupancy will not be limited and masks will be optional.

**Fellowship Hall** – The Fellowship Hall will be available for meetings, church functions and rentals.

**Committees** – Ministry events and functions will be determined by the committee chairs and the committees.

**Parish Ed** -- Sunday School is open and VBS is being planned. Youth and Family events are also being planned.

**Visitation** – Pastor and Eucharist Ministry will be making home and hospital visits as allowed by the institutions.

**Added Worship Service** – If there is sufficient interest, we will add another worship service that has strict safety guidelines for those who are not comfortable with the relaxed safety precautions of the other services. Please contact the church office if you are interested.

These past fifteen months has been a time to test patience, discernment, flexibility, and creativity. One of the first communications that I sent out when the pandemic started and safety precautions were put in place included a quote from “Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague” written by Martin Luther in 1527 during the Black Plague in Europe that came in waves for over 300 years. I include that again.

**“Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.**

**Moreover, he who has contracted the disease and recovered should keep away from others and not admit them into his presence unless it be necessary. Though one should aid him in his time of need, as previously pointed out, he in turn should, after his recovery, so act toward others that no one becomes unnecessarily endangered on his account and so cause another’s death. ‘Whoever loves danger, says the wise man, will perish by it’ [Ecclus. 3:26].” p132.**

Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, translated by Carl J. Schindler, vol. 43 (Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 113–38.

Your Pastor,  
Tim W Muehlbrad