

Hi Everyone,

Peace to you in Jesus! I pray that all is well for you and your families.

It looks like we are still on track to return to worshipping together on Sunday, June 7th. I am writing on behalf of the Board of Elders.

As we prepare for doing that, our goal is to keep everyone safe and healthy. Based on input from Dr. Mike Zaruba and the Chairman of the congregation, Troy Barker, the elders have discussed and approved new procedures/ways of doing things that will help all of us to work together toward that goal

Though we have habits and patterns when it comes to attending worship (*where we park, which door we enter, where we sit, what time we arrive, etc.*), we ask for your help in doing things differently according to the procedures below. Out of an abundance of care for each other, we pray that the following will be a blessing to you and the other members of the congregation in order to minimize the risk of spreading Covid-19. When we re-open, we want to be able to stay open. **I ask you to read the contents of this entire letter, so that you will be familiar with the new procedures.**

1. Before you make plans to come to worship, please honestly assess the following:

a. **Are you feeling well?** If not, please remain at home and do not attend worship until you are feeling better—back to 100%.

b. **Are you older and/or do you have some other health conditions that increase your risk?** If so, we strongly recommend that you remain at home and do not attend worship. The service will continue to be recorded. If you would like to receive Communion, please contact Pastor to make an appointment to do so at the church per the procedures that are currently being used.

2. Building entry: Please enter the building through the main south doors to the newer part of the building—the ones that take you into the narthex right outside of the sanctuary. Someone will open/hold the door for you.

****Note:** Though it seems that many arrive for worship about 5 minutes before the service begins, we ask you to plan to arrive earlier. This will help so that we don't have a large number of people entering the building all at the same time. The doors mentioned above will be open by 8:30 a.m.

3. Masks: The elders strongly encourage everyone to bring a mask and wear it properly during worship. For those who do not have a mask, the Board of Elders has made arrangements to have some available at no cost for those who need them. As you enter the building, one of the elders will provide one to those who do not have them.

4. Sanctuary seating: The doors from the narthex to the sanctuary will be open. In order to maintain appropriate social distancing, we ask family members to sit together at one of the spots marked in the pews.

****Note:** Please fill the sanctuary from the front of each section. After the service, people will be dismissed from the rear of the sanctuary first with those in front being dismissed last.

5. Singing during the service: Lutheran Christians are known as singing people. Though our great and gracious God has given us so many reasons to praise Him and to do so loudly because of His many gifts to us physically and spiritually, we ask that your singing be done more quietly than normal. Research has been provided to the Board of Elders that indicates singing as a likely way that Covid-19 is spread from one person to another. Good alternatives for those who like to sing and do so loudly are to:

a. "lip sync" or mouth the words without making much if any sound. (*Over, please*)

- b. think about the words as they are sung.

6. Hymnals and Bulletins: Hymnals will not be in the pew racks during the services. They will be stacked on a table in the narthex. If you plan to use a hymnal, someone wearing a mask and gloves will hand you the number that you/your family need. Until further notice, we want you to consider those as your personal hymnals to use. After each service, we ask that you take the hymnals that you have used home with you and bring them back the next week for worship. (*Plastic bags will be provided for you to carry them.*) This will minimize the need for sanitizing and also help with good stewardship when it comes to the cost of paper and printing.

The order of worship will be printed in the bulletin in the usual format. Also available will be several copies of a large print format that has everything printed out including the hymns. Someone wearing a mask and gloves will distribute paper copies of both kinds of bulletin in the narthex.

****Note:** Both formats of the bulletin will be posted to Trinity's website. You can print those off at home and bring your own copies. Or, you can also access the bulletin during worship with your smart phone, tablet, iPad, etc.

7. Prayer Requests: If you have someone/something you'd like me to include in prayers during worship, please do one of the following:

- a. Call/e-mail me in the days before the service to notify me about the prayer request.
- b. Speak to me before the service.

8. Communion Procedures: Appropriate social distancing will be observed at the Communion rail. A distance of at least 6 feet should be allowed between family groups and/or individuals. The Communion elements will be prepared for the service by an elder wearing a mask and gloves as he does so.

- a. To avoid standing in lines together, an usher will indicate when it is your turn to come to the Communion rail. Please exit your pew at the end closest to you and take the shortest route to the rail after the previous table leaves.
- b. Those at the rail are asked to remain standing in order to minimize the need to sanitize the Communion rail between tables.
- c. Pastor and an elder will distribute the host/wafer and the individual cups. They will both wear masks and gloves.
 - 1.) Please have your hands open and together in the shape of a cross to receive the wafer. It will be carefully dropped into your open hands.
 - 2.) The individual cups will be handed to you. Please take hold of the cup from the bottom.
- d. Trays/baskets will be placed on stands near the ends of the Communion rails to collect individual cups after each table.
- e. When you are done communing, return to where you were sitting by the shortest route.

9. Offering: The offering plate will not be passed. A plate will be available on a table in the narthex. Please place your offering in that plate either before or after the service.

10. Attendance/Communion Registration: The elders and I will make a list of those who have participated in worship and Holy Communion after each service.

11. After the service: Individuals/family groups will be ushered out of the sanctuary beginning from the back.

- a. Pastor will greet people from an appropriate distance in the narthex as they leave. He will not be shaking hands or doing fist or elbow bumps.

(Next page, please)

- b. For the sake of avoiding bottlenecks and larger groups of people together, we ask that you move through the narthex into the Fellowship Hall or outside. As you exit the building, someone will hold the doors for you.
- c. We know that people will want to visit with each other. That is certainly fine, but we ask that those who do so maintain appropriate social distancing of 6 feet or more.
- d. For the time being, no coffee or other refreshments will be available either before or after the service.

11. Sunday School: There will be no Sunday School classes and the wiffle ball games will be postponed until all post-service socializing is allowed to take place.

12. Adult Bible study will be held in the sanctuary after everyone is dismissed. The center section of the sanctuary will be used for seating. The hard surfaces on the marked spots of those pews will be sanitized before Bible study begins. Again social distancing will be maintained with seating and dismissal similar to worship.

13. Final comments: There will be a “learning curve” for all of us when it comes to these procedures. None of us are perfect. We ask you to be patient and gracious with us and each other.

The elders know that there are many personal opinions about the various responses to Covid-19 around the country. No doubt there will be different opinions about the procedures above. We pray that sometime soon we can lessen or discontinue them. In the meantime, per our responsibility for supervision of public worship, these are part of our best, good-faith effort as a congregation to help keep those who come to worship safe and healthy and to avoid becoming a stumbling block to others when it comes to hearing the good news about Jesus.

As stated in correspondence with you earlier in May, we pray that you will put the best construction on these procedures in your conversations with others in the congregation and otherwise. We don’t want to give “*opportunity to the devil*” (Ephesians 4:27) to create division based on assumptions about motives, etc. When and where that happens, our living Lord calls us to repentance—to turn from our sinful ways and words and to confess to and forgive each other.

If you have questions or comments or suggestions about ways to do things better, please give a call me or feel free to contact the elders directly.

In closing, I ask you to please read Romans 14:1-23. (*See reverse side of this page.*) In that chapter, the apostle Paul was writing to the Roman Christians about the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. There was division in that congregation about whether believers in Christ should do such a thing.

Though that was a far different issue than Covid-19, I believe that much of what Paul says in that chapter is helpful for us as we have different opinions about the various responses to this health crisis. Thankfully, our eternal salvation does not depend on our response to or our performance of the procedures listed above. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone!

These words that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write help us keep the “big picture” in mind as we interact with each other as fellow sinners on this and other issues. **Romans 14:19:** “*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*” Paul said that another way in his letter to the Ephesians. **Ephesians 4:1-2, ESV:** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Over, please)

I pray that the Holy Spirit will bless us with that mindset as we return to worshiping together in the same place at the same time but with different procedures for doing so.

Again, if you need anything, please give me a call. God's continued blessings to you!

In Christ, our risen and ascended Good Shepherd!

Pastor Jon Rathjen

Romans 14:1–23

¹As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ²One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹³Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. ²²The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. ²³But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.