

July 6, 2020

Greetings everyone,

We've now been in the Green Phase of the plan to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania for a couple of weeks. As a first step in returning to in-person worship we will be worshipping outdoors, weather permitting, near the pavilion across the street from the church this coming Sunday July 12th at 9:00 am. If all goes well we will also plan have in-person outdoor worship on July 26th at the same time. As I mentioned in my article in the most recent *Informer* a committee has been meeting to identify and implement the practices and procedures we'll need to follow in order to balance our longing to worship in person with our obligation to do so as safely as possible. As much as some of us may wish that we could just throw open our doors and pick up where we left off in early March, knowing what we now know about the virus, that simply isn't possible nor is it in the best interest of many members of our church family.

During our committee meetings our discussions were rooted in the Great Commandment in which Jesus says "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37, 39 NRSV) We consulted various sources including *Considerations for Returning to In-person Worship* produced by the ELCA and *Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic* produced by The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments of which the ELCA is part. We also took the recommendations from professional associations, the CDC, the WHO as well as input from members of the Emmanuel's community into consideration. We then established guidelines we believe are reasonable for Emmanuel's at this point in time. These guidelines will be reevaluated regularly and modified when warranted.

That was probably more information than you needed, but I wanted to clearly show that we took our responsibilities seriously and that the guidelines are based on the following words found in *Resuming Care-Filled Worship* "Because we love God, we want to offer worship that brings our very best" and "Because we love our neighbors, we want to do everything we can to make sure we bring no harm to anyone when we gather." All of the guidelines are listed on a separate sheet included with this letter, but there are several points I want to highlight.

- You must sign-up in advance to attend our outdoor service. Details on how to sign up are on the attached guidelines. For the first service we are limiting attendance to what we are calling 20 household units rather than a hard limit on the number of people able to attend. A household unit can range from one person up to as many people who reside in one location.
- The service will last approximately 30 minutes.
- Please bring your own lawn chair. The pavilion will be closed except for worship leaders. Therefore, everyone will be seated in the lawn area. It will be the middle of July so take your ability to tolerate high temperatures into consideration. Some kind of head covering as well as water may be advisable.

- Everyone, except for children under the age of 2 **must wear a mask**. A limited number of masks will be available should you forget to bring one. If, for medical reasons you can't wear a mask or if you choose not to wear a mask for any other reason it's important for your well-being and your consideration for others that you continue to worship exclusively online. Do not attend any services if you are feeling ill, have been exposed to COVID-19, have a weakened immune system or are at high risk of exposing others We will continue to stream full traditional and contemporary services at 8:00 am and 9:30 am respectively as we have since March. **We are also making it possible for those of you who don't have internet access to call a special phone number (610) 477-0100 to listen to our online services at your convenience.** Hopefully this option will be available by the 12th.
- Seating areas will be clearly marked to maintain physical distancing guidelines. Please remain in the location your household occupies throughout the service. This includes keeping children with you. Ushers will be available to help you find a spot.
- The service will be different from what you are used to. It will be based on *The Service of the Word* found in ELW (the red Hymnal). There won't be Holy Communion. We are still discussing how to safely and respectfully resume Holy Communion.
- Everything will be spoken. There will be limited meditative music. Following the guidance of National Association of Teachers of Singing and the American Choral Directors Association there will not be any singing. Also please mouth any unison prayers and responses or meditate on the words as the leader says them rather than speaking aloud. Both singing and unison praying have been shown to project virus spreading droplets and aerosols well beyond six feet even when wearing a mask.
- A bulletin will not be needed or printed for the service, but should you desire one it will be available on the church website. It is recommended that you follow along via your phone or other device if you have one.
- Offering baskets will not be passed. Baskets will be available for you to place your offering in when you arrive or as you leave or take advantage of one of our electronic giving options. In case inclement weather or if the Lehigh Valley goes back to the yellow or red phase, the outdoor service will be cancelled, an announcement will be made on the church phone answering machine, Facebook page, WFMZ and website. The service will not be held indoors. Members should instead tune in to online worship.

I'm sure this much information is overwhelming for some of you, but again everything is being done to keep everyone, especially the most vulnerable members of our community safe. Christ calls all of us to care for, serve, and love one another. May the Holy Spirit be alive within us as we move forward by loving and servicing each other in Christ's name for the good of everyone in our community. I look forward to seeing some of you on the 12th. It has been a long time! May God continue to bless all of us in the days to come.

On behalf of the re-opening committee, I remain yours in Christ,
Pr. Dan