



"Are We There Yet?"

It was in the middle of March when the coronavirus changed life as we knew it. This week we're going to pause and take a look back and a look ahead by highlighting some of the ways in which we moved and are continuing to move forward in the midst of our uncertainty.

Before I outline how events have unfolded and our response I want to remind you that a committee representing various segments of our church family has been working diligently on the reopening process and that every decision that has been made by this committee and the church council has always had the health, safety, and wellbeing of our entire community as our uppermost priority. This includes having people provide contact information when attending any service or function in the event that if we are exposed to COVID-19 we are able to contact those who attended in order to facilitate testing thereby limiting the potential spread throughout the wider community. I know that some do not agree with some of the decisions that have been made. Some think we're not doing anything; some think we're moving too slow, and others think we're moving too fast. The members of the committee don't always agree either, but we come to a consensus understanding that we can't get our own way all the time. We are simply a group of people trying to do what's best for everyone which is difficult when there are so many opinions regarding the correct way to proceed.

With that being said, here is a recounting of events.

- March 15th we suspended in person worship and began live streaming one service each Sunday thinking that it would only be a couple of weeks before we would be able to return. This was in keeping with decisions made at the State level and the President's March 13th issuing of a National Emergency, which included Emergency Disaster Declarations for all 50 states for emergency protective measures for COVID-19 response. We immediately began live streaming a Sunday morning service on Facebook.
- On March 25th Lehigh and Northampton counties were added to the counties subject to the Stay-at Home Order of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We continued to livestream a weekly service.
- April 5th at the request of those who attend our traditional service the Palm Sunday service was live streamed from our traditional sanctuary.
- April 10th & 11th live streamed a Maundy Thursday Love Feast and Good Friday Tenebrae service with members of our community participating remotely.
- April 12th Resurrection Sunday (Easter) we began streaming both traditional and contemporary services. Beth streamed a Sunrise hymn sing/concert.
- We continue to stream two services each week.
- Soon after starting to stream two services every week we added a "virtual coffee hour" between services for people to connect with each other using Zoom
- May 3rd we changed the way we produce and broadcast the services to enhance the quality of our worship experience.
- June 5th Lehigh and Northampton counties moved to the yellow phase of the reopening plan. We chose to follow the recommendations of the ELCA and Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and continued worshipping exclusively online. This course was the same one taken by the majority of ELCA churches in our area. Some churches were still not worshipping in any form at this time.

- June 26th Lehigh and Northampton counties moved to the green phase of the reopening plan.
- We decided to offer outdoor service beginning in July starting with the services scheduled for the 12th and 26th while continuing to offer both traditional and contemporary services online. The announcement of the beginning of in person worship and our rationale for the guidelines for attending were detailed in a letter dated July 6th sent via the USPS to all members of the congregation. That letter is still available for you to view on our website www.emmanuel.org. As you can see we began offering in person worship within two weeks of entering the green phase and continued to offer both traditional and contemporary services online.
- In August we started offering an outdoor Service of the Word every Sunday as well as continuing our online services.
- At the beginning of August, we decided that small groups could gather on the church premises providing everyone wear face coverings and maintain physical distancing guidelines.
- In August we made it possible for those who don't have internet access to listen to Sunday services by calling a dedicated phone number that multiple people can call at the same time. As with our online services the telephone recording is available for listening at any time during the week not just Sunday morning. The phone number which was included in the letter referenced above is (610) 477-0100.
- August 9th we opened the pavilion to those attending. The wearing of face coverings and maintaining physical distance between household groups is still required, but people don't have to sit out in the sun. We plan to continue allowing people into the pavilion moving forward.
- August 10th the men's Bible study group began meeting in the pavilion.
- August 19 we were informed that our new insurance carrier does not require liability waivers. As a result, we will no longer require people to sign liability waivers for small group gatherings and worship services. Other precautions remain in effect.
- We will continue to worship at the pavilion throughout the month of September. The reopening committee and the church council will continue to monitor the situation to determine when we feel it is safe to move inside the building.
- September 6th we will begin celebrating Holy Communion. More information will be given in the September issue of the Informer.
- We are hopeful that we will see a slowing in the number of people being affected by the coronavirus and that we will be able to transition to worshipping in some form indoors in the not too distant future. As much as we wish that we could give you a firm date that this will happen with the way things change from day to day it's simply not responsible for us to set a definite date at this time.
- Even though we have not been gathering in the manner in which we're familiar **THE CHURCH HAS NOT BEEN CLOSED**. For example, among other things we have continued to support various charities and causes including the Bath Area Food Bank, Access Services, and the Hackerman-Patz House at LVHN. Work crews comprised of both youth and adults have worked on community gardens and assisting a family in dire need with yard work. We have also maintained telephone contact with our homebound. These kinds of activities as well as others continue.

This was supposed to be a short list of bullet points letting everyone know what we've been up to while we've been physically apart, but there has been a lot happening and many decisions have been made. Please forgive me for the length.

Blessings,
Pr. Dan