

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 27, 2020

Dear Fellow Members of Zion,

We hope this letter finds you safe and well. As our lives continue to be affected by COVID-19 we find that not only do we miss activities that are extremely important in our lives, we also must adjust to new ways of doing many things including in-person worship services.

The church council would first like to thank you most sincerely for your continuing support during this most unusual time. We would like to assure you that we are very involved with formulating plans to eventually resume Sunday Worship services with modifications that will comply with the recommendations of the state and national public health authorities. We initially thought that we might be able to put these plans into effect when York County transitioned into the yellow phase; however, that will have to be delayed a while.

We met on Monday, May 19th to assess the situation. At that meeting (via Zoom) we discussed the recommendations from Bishop Dunlop and the guidelines from the ELCA for returning to in-person worship. We also had input from Pastor George Schneider, Pastor Doug DeStephano and Pastor Paul Haack. All of the advice was to continue to worship in the virtual mode at this time. The goal is to minimize risk to the congregation. A significant portion of our congregation is in the highest risk age group and we do not want to expose them unnecessarily. We must also recognize that the risk is heightened when a group of people are gathered in a room for a prolonged period of time breathing the same air. Our goal is to ease back into services, starting small and probably starting outside.

Council will be meeting at 7:00 on Monday June 1 via Zoom. We will continue to gather information and recommendations. In that regard, we welcome your questions and suggestions and concerns.

Some of the modifications that we would need to implement in order to comply with ELCA guidelines for an in-person service include:

- Providing two worship services to enhance social distancing (to accommodate limited numbers)
- Clearly indicating and strongly encouraging adequately spaced seating
- Removing hymnals from the pews and relying entirely on printed bulletins
- Suspending choir and congregational singing because a safe social distance extends to 15 feet when singing
- Limiting speaking in unison
- Requiring the wearing of masks during worship
- Suspending or modifying the passing of the peace
- Celebrating a liturgy of the Word to reduce the risk of infection through the distribution of the communion elements (at least until safety can be assured)
- Suspending nursery
- Maintaining social distancing when entering and leaving the building
- Using the sanctuary for one service and the fellowship hall for the other. This will ensure that each service will be in a clean area. These areas will be cleaned and sanitized weekly
- Worshiping outdoors weather permitting
- Provide on line access to the worship service in order to reach those who are reticent to worship with a large group

While many of these changes may feel overwhelming and disappointing, we must follow the guidance of health care professionals to promote the health and safety of our congregation. Many details must be ironed out by council. Many questions must be answered. Again, we welcome your questions, your concerns and your suggestions. For now, we will continue virtual worship.

We sincerely hope that these changes are temporary but in the interim, we will do the best we can.

In Peace,

Zion Church Council