



FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sharing Christ's Love

June 18, 2020

Dear members and friends of First Lutheran,

We miss you. We miss seeing you at church, talking with you, and worshipping next to you. We are ready to find ways to be together again, although we know we must proceed cautiously, with an abundance of care for the most vulnerable among us. Since returning to the office on June 1 (*and actually well before then*), we have been imagining what worship will be like when we return. We've talked through just about every scenario you can imagine. We've read the recommendations from the CDC, the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Northern Illinois Synod. We've talked with our colleagues in Henry County and across the nation about how to do this well. We've prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we make decisions. And, now we've discerned, together with staff members, worship leaders, and the Congregation Council, how to move forward.

As we resume on-site worship on the church campus, we realize that many people will still worship from home. We encourage you to continue worshipping from home if you are in a high-risk category (*over the age of 65 or have underlying health conditions*). We will continue to make worship available each weekend on Facebook and YouTube so that you can worship from home. You can still let us know with a comment or an e-mail that you are worshipping with us from home, and we will record your attendance.

We want to do everything we can to keep each other safe and healthy, and so we have some guidelines in place for when we gather. Here's what you can expect if you choose to return to outdoor worship on-site this coming month:

- **Worship Space** – All outdoor worship services will be in the south parking lot. You are welcome to park in the Main Street parking lot, at the Central Bank Administration Center parking lot, or on the streets surrounding the church. Worshippers will bring their own chairs to use for worship. Each household will find an open parking stall to set up their chairs. We will maintain physical distance while we worship.
- **Cancellation due to weather** – If we are not able to worship due to weather, we will announce the cancellation at least 1 hour prior to the worship start time via text, e-mail, and Facebook. (*Please make sure we have your cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses up to date in the church office. Contact Mary Jo at mjbrummet@firstgeneseo.org with updates.*) In the event of cancellation, pre-recorded Worship will still be available each weekend on Facebook and YouTube.
- **Masks** – When we are outdoors, masks are optional. Please have your mask with you, and if you need to enter the church building for any reason (*i.e. to use the restroom*), please wear your mask. If you forget your mask at home, the church will provide you with one.
- **Restrooms** – The first-floor restrooms will be open and surfaces (*door handles, stall locks, toilet seats, flushers, faucets, etc...*) will be wiped down between services.
- **Hymnals and offering plates** – We are eliminating the need to share physical resources and pass communal items. We will not be distributing hymnals for use during worship, but you are welcome to “*check out*” a hymnal and take it home for your own devotional use during these weeks. Instead of passing offering plates, you may drop your offering in the drop box available during worship, or you can continue to contribute online, set up automated giving, or mail your offering to the church.

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- **Communion** – Our first two weekends, we will have a Service of the Word. Beginning July 11 & 12, we will offer Holy Communion during outdoor worship. Individual cups of juice with a wafer sealed on top will be distributed at the beginning of worship. When it's time, we will all commune together. If you're not planning on joining us for outdoor worship, but would still like to receive communion, please contact us.

So many details! It will be necessary for all of us to remain flexible. While we are doing our best to anticipate how worship will happen, we know that we cannot plan for every possibility. Our plans may change as needed after we worship together and see how things go. Our plans may also change as new scientific research becomes available about how the virus spreads, and as recommendations from the state and from our churchwide leaders change. The council, staff, and the re-opening worship task force continue to work toward opening the sanctuary for worship soon. There will be more details about worship indoors soon.

Through these weeks of new ways of worshipping together, I invite you to let your spirit feel all the feels. Pastor Laura already plans on crying some happy tears when she sees folks gathered for outdoor worship, and then crying some sad tears because we still can't shake hands and hug each other. Please, reach out to us. Tell us what parts of worship you find most meaningful and where you are struggling. Ask questions. Give us feedback. And, as always, we ask for you to hold us, along with the entire staff and lay leadership of the congregation, in prayer, asking God to preserve our well-being, strengthen our faith, and guide our next steps.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Laura & Pastor Matt