

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ connected with St. Peter's Lutheran Church,

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

The reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection is the grounds of our faith and hope today, and it is the source of our love. The current stay-at-home orders and the ongoing pandemic do not remove those blessings of grace. We still trust the God who looked upon his son's sacrifice for all on the cross and raised him from the dead, giving him the name above every name, crowning him Lord of all. We still hope because the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is promised to give life to our mortal bodies at Jesus' full and final return. We still love others, because that Spirit lives in you and me today by grace, binding us together as the body of Jesus on this earth to display his presence and love.

The past number of weeks of closing our gathering space have been difficult. Nevertheless, in the midst of this challenging time, I thank God that we have been able to work together to embody the love of Christ in the Spirit in ways that were once unfamiliar to us. I thank God for your support of our congregation's efforts together - participating in online services either by watching or by contributing various elements, requesting hard copies of sermons if you have no internet access, forming an email group, making phone calls to one another, sharing in Zoom gatherings via screens, adjusting to Confirmation classes online, transforming our Little Library to our Little Pantry, giving of your finances, praying for one another and others, holding meetings for the council and deacons via email, and more. All of this that we do and share in together as a group is the work of the Spirit amongst us to reveal our trust, hope and love that flows from Jesus. I thank God for all of you and what we have been doing together.

On March 17, I wrote to you all to inform you that we were closing our gathering space for 8 weeks as a way to embody the love of Christ to others. As we have been approaching that deadline, the deacons, council, and myself have decided our next steps at this time. Our physical gathering space will remain closed beyond May 17. We are not setting a specific date as for when we will gather in that space again, but we do have specific criteria we are looking to be met in order for us to consider gathering again. The criteria are as follows:

1. When the government of Minnesota lifts the stay-at-home orders;
2. When the gathering of religious communities is approved again;
3. When the gathering of groups of 50 is approved again.

When these three things are met, we will then consider a date when we will begin to gather in our space for services again.

To be clear, we reserve the ability to change these criteria as the situation changes. However, this is our current official position on considering reopening. Also, we want you to be informed that protocols are being created for our congregation regarding what it will be like when we choose to reopen. These protocols include matters of social distancing, masks, personal hygiene, disinfection and cleaning of our space, when and how we would consider sharing the

Lord's Supper, as well as continuing the use of videos after we reopen for those who may still choose or need to remain home. These protocols will be provided to you when finalized.

I know that this may be troubling. It is hard not knowing when this will end and when we can get back to being together. I also know that this is not just a matter of our services, but hearing that your congregation is still not open for gatherings may also touch on other very real issues you are facing these days regarding health concerns, job loss, mental and emotional well-being, or other serious concerns. If you are facing any of these concerns or other issues not mentioned here, please reach out to me or to your deacon that we can best walk with you. If you need help financially, or could use the help of someone else going to the store for you, or some other need, please contact us. Even if we can not meet the specific need, we are bound in love together in the resurrected Lord Jesus. We all need the support of one another through this, just as the larger community needs our love and support by not gathering together. The deacons, council and myself stand by this decision to keep our space closed as an act of love to embody Jesus to others in the days ahead.

While we are choosing not to gather together in love for others, it does not mean we cease to do the work of the church on earth. We will continue to send out video services and hard copies to those who do not have access to the internet. If you can not access the videos we have been sending, please let me know so you can be included in a way that works for your situation. Also, if you have not been receiving email updates regarding prayers and links to our services, and you would like to have your email included, please let me know so that I can properly update that list.

While we have been working to adapt well to this changing situation (and I commend us all in the Spirit for what we have been doing) we are going to do our best to move forward in keeping with our mission statement - "to welcome all people into the kingdom of God by fostering relationships." Plans were being developed at the beginning of March in order to address how we evaluate and shape our congregation in light of this mission statement. I believe the changes we have made the last 8 weeks have in fact been keeping with this mission. In the weeks and months ahead, we are going to be intentionally engaging this process of evaluation and shaping our work in light of our mission and our current context.

One specific aspect of this that I want to put before you all today is that the first step the council and I identified back in March was to form a prayer group. This would not be a prayer chain for the concerns of individuals, but a group that would be praying specifically about our mission and how we carry it out in our current context. The group would be lifting up the congregation as a whole, our evaluation of where we are currently, and our direction forward in our mission, as well as the process through these various steps. If you are interested in participating in that specific prayer group, please let me know - call, email, or write a letter. This is an open opportunity for any of you who would like to participate

Just as in the previous 8 weeks we have been able to walk together in Christ in an unfamiliar way, so the weeks ahead present an opportunity to continue to walk together as the people of God in faith, hope and love. We will continue to be the church by God's grace and Christ, working and adapting to find ways to embody that reality in a changing context. What that exactly will be, we do not know, but we continue to walk in Christ who promises that he goes with us by his Spirit today, empowering us to love one another and others until the day of his return and the restoration of all things.

It has been a joy to engage these days together with you. I look forward to our continued life together in Christ in the days ahead.

Christ has come. Christ is here now, through you and me. Christ will come again.  
In Christ,

Pastor Chris Weber

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