

May 26, 2020 Re-Opening Criteria for St Peters

Greetings brothers and sisters connected with St. Peters,

A number of developments have taken place in our state regarding orders around returning to worship during this pandemic. The stay-at-home orders were lifted last week. This past weekend orders were given that allowed houses of worship to open at 25% capacity starting May 27. As you may recall from the last letter I sent out to the congregation, we were looking for three criteria before we would consider re-opening.

1. Stay-at-home orders lifted
2. Houses of worship being allowed to gather
3. Groups of 50 being allowed.

Given the recent changes, these three criteria have been met (25% of our capacity is 58 people). The deacons met via email and phone the last two days to discuss these matters, as per our constitution and by laws, they hold the "responsibility for the worship life of the congregation."

The Deacons and I have decided that we will not be re-opening this weekend or in the next few weeks. This decision was made for a few reasons.

1. We are not currently ready. We are still in the process of developing and finalizing protocols for what it will look like when we do gather (especially cleaning procedures). It is an act of responsibility to have a clear plan for the safety of the congregation and the community before we re-open. Also, the government of Minnesota just recently sent out their guidance for houses of worship which includes requirements that we need to put in place before we can consider opening.

2. The Minnesota Department of Health is still calling for the peak in our state to be in the weeks ahead. Though we may desire to gather, the risks that we feel are involved are still too high. The next few weeks may be revealing one way or the other regarding the course of the disease in our area.

3. There is no need to rush. What we are currently doing is not perfect, but it works for now. Choosing to hold off on opening is not saying we will do nothing. Some of you have shared wonderful stories about how the gospel is going out and relationships are being fostered in unexpected ways. We can continue to be the church and we will continue to be the church. We are also just beginning to endeavor into an evaluation process regarding how we are going to shape ourselves around our mission. The Holy Spirit continues to be active, and so we remain active in our faith, hope and love for the other, even as we choose to wait to gather.

The deacons and I will continue to be in conversation about these things, as will the council. Once we have a plan for re-opening in place that aligns with state and department of health guidelines, you will be informed. To be clear, finalizing a plan does not mean we will automatically meet. We will also continue to assess the state of the pandemic in our area in order to make a wise and calm decision about a way forward.

Again, we do not want to rush, but we are striving for decisions that are responsible and consistent with our mission. If you have questions about any of this, please feel free to contact me.

In Christ,
Pastor Chris Weber