

Grace is reopening and worshipping again in the Sanctuary! As we reopen, we all have a personal responsibility and must remember that the health and safety of all is paramount. And where that starts is with each of you. Every member and visitor should understand the dangerous nature of this contagious disease and take appropriate personal measures to ensure the safety of each other.

This is the “Agape” love that we so frequently talk about in Christianity. It is sacrificial love that gives up our personal wants, desires and even rights for the sake of others. It not only gives these up but does so willingly and gladly.

This is what Paul is speaking about in 1 Corinthians 13, the great “Chapter of Love” when he says, “love does not insist on its own way.” He follows by saying that Love is “Not irritable or resentful” and that “love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.” So let’s get ready to show the world some real Christian Agape Love and joyfully work together to keep each other safe, enjoy our modified times and form of worship and fellowship and rejoice that we are on the road to recovery! In short, a healthy, loving attitude is critical.

In support of Governor Newsom lifting the order against having in-house church services, the California Department of Public Health has put out guidelines for churches to follow. In support of those guidelines, churches were asked to put together a Covid-19 response plan. What this plan does is allow all of us to take some steps to ensure the safety and well-being of others:

Questions to ask yourself before coming to worship:

- Do you have any of the following respiratory symptoms: Fever, sore throat, cough, new shortness of breath. If yes to any of those questions, please stay home. *[This would include if you have had rash or bodily aches in the last 14 days, stay home, or are in a high-risk category]*
- Have you been exposed to or worked with a person with confirmed Covid-19. If so, please stay at home for the recommended quarantine time frame.
- If you have a temperature greater than 100.4, you should stay at home. (see below)

All congregation members and guests shall practice safe social and physical

Distancing:

- Until further notice per Stanislaus Public Health Department no gathering of more than 100 people or 25% of maximum (which would mean 75 for us) people shall occur on site.
- Model Social Distancing (defined as six feet of separation as much as possible) when interacting with person’s other than immediate family members of the same household.
- Handshakes and hugs will be avoided.
- The use of face masks, while not mandated, is strongly encouraged of all coming to worship.
- If there is a need to cough or sneeze, please do so into your sleeve or elbow away from others.

Anyone coming into the facility exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms, not feeling well, or having a fever greater than 100.4 will be asked not to enter the facility.

- We have ordered, or have obtained, non-intrusive infrared thermometers to take temperatures of all who enter the facility. Again, anyone with a temperature above 100.4 will be asked not to enter the facility.
- If someone becomes ill while at the worship service, they will be provided a mask and sent home.
- Anyone coming onsite must self-monitor and not arrive if symptomatic.
- Mask are encouraged for anyone whose health warrants additional precaution or are considered in a vulnerable group susceptible to Covid-19.

Environment:

- We have posted signs indicating the need for frequent hand washing and practicing of good hygiene.
- In addition, we have installed hand sanitizer stations in the Narthex by the drinking fountain, and in Luther Hall on the west and east walls.
- We will be disinfecting the sanctuary between services using a disinfecting spray on hard surfaces people come into contact with.
- We will not be congregating in Luther Hall following worship services. What this means is that, at least in the *short term*, there will be no time of fellowship following worship in Luther Hall.
- Open doors and windows to ventilate facilities when weather permits.
- Any planned activities will include only those activities that do not require close physical contact between persons.
- *For a church family that loves each other, the following precautions are going to be a challenge, but hopefully we will be allowed to return to them in three weeks when the state is set to review their protocols:*
 - *There will be no greeting and shaking of hands or hugging upon entering or at the beginning of the service.*
 - *There will be no greeting and handshaking at the end of the service.*
 - *There will not be a a time of fellowship at the end of the service.*
 - *This means there will be no snacks – truly a sign of our suffering! But I will smile and rejoice that we are together!*

Modifications to the worship service:

- We will continue to provide worship guided by our Lutheran Service Book. However, all hymnals, pew bibles, attendance sheets, and cards will be removed from the pews given our inability to disinfect them between services. Services will be projected on the screens only. You may bring your own copy of the LSB if you desire. *[Seating will be restricted as we will be using alternating pews. Do not try to sit in the rows that are taped off and realize the pew you normally sit in may not be available. Maintain social distancing of 6 feet unless you are a family unit. Please be courteous and take seats that are closest to the side or center aisles so that others can sit at the opposite end if needed.]*

- Plans for worship services will include adjusting the times and number of services commensurate with the number of people authorized to worship and our ability to disinfect the sanctuary. **With 75 persons authorized, we will have two services, one at 8:15 am and one at 10:30 am.**
- Given the need for multiple services limited in numbers, **we will be asking families to sign up for the service they will attend.**
- Instead of filling out attendance books you will be given an opportunity to check off on a list that you are in attendance when you enter the facility.
- We will be shifting to Facebook live to broadcast our service with a recording to be posted later in the day.
- We are to be aware that singing has been identified as a potent means of spreading the virus. Unfortunately, what this will mean is that singing, at least in the **near term** will be curtailed.
- Altar guild will prepare for communion as they normally do, except they will be wearing masks and gloves as they do so. Wine will be spaced in the trays in every third slot to prevent and issues.
- Communion will be distributed through continuous communion. In order to maintain safe distancing guidelines, we will commune one side of the church and then the other, as well as maintain six feet of separation for people in line to receive the wafer and communal wine. There will be no common cup available.
- Lay ministers assisting will be wearing gloves and masks.
- The offering will be collected at the back of the church as people exit the sanctuary.
- *We will not be handing out any print media, but you may bring your personal copy of the Lutheran Service Book if you wish to follow the service in that manner.*

I have been asked about Bible study. Certainly, I want to start our Sunday study up as soon as possible. Some of our weekday studies have started back up already. More information on this is forthcoming.

I pray the Lord walks with us during this time of transition to grow us and make our faith and resolve to live out the Gospel stronger and I look forward to gathering again in God's house to worship and praise Him for the grace He pours out on us each and every day.

Pastor Tom