



When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? (Psalm 56:3-4 ESV)

June 11, 2020

Dear Church Family at Mt. Hope,

I believe it is safe to say that the past three months have been unlike any that we have ever lived through. We have been forced physically apart and have not been able to worship together in-person. And yet, God is still God and we are still His people. We have seen some of the greatest blessings of care and provision from God and among the body of Christ during this time. God is indeed faithful in all circumstances and He is good!

However, the time is nearing for us to consider how we may begin to come back together as a congregation. The past several weeks, many of your church leaders, boards, and Council have been spending several hours planning and discussing how this might be achieved. I thank each and every one of them for their time, dedication, leadership, and support of God's mission.

Before the particulars of our plan to worship together are discussed, **I ask that everyone first please read and keep the following things in mind:**

- 1) This pandemic caused our churches to temporarily stop meeting in-person for the safety of our people. However, Scripture says we are "*not to neglect meeting together*" (Heb. 10:23) because the Church by definition worships together. Furthermore, while we have moved God's Word to an online format (and praise be to God for allowing us to do that), these online services are never a substitute for our regular gathering together. It should always be our desire to meet together, as well as receive the gift of the Lord's Supper, which we have not been able to receive for some time. ***Therefore, coming together in-person for Word and Sacrament should always be our goal.***
- 2) That said, ***there will still be some in our church body that may not be comfortable in returning to church right away. That is okay.*** We understand everyone will need to make that decision for themselves when the time is right.
- 3) ***Additionally, we encourage those who are considered high-risk due to age or health conditions to continue to keep yourself safe.*** While we feel we have planned as much as possible to keep our parishioners safe in church, there will always be a risk. We do not need to be afraid of risk, only sensible when it comes to our own decisions, as with anything else in life. Pastor will continue offering God's proclaimed Word in an online format for the foreseeable future and offer pastoral care for those who are not able to return to in-person worship yet.

- 4) Your church leaders were tasked with deciding how best to start bringing our congregation back to worship. Everyone took seriously our need to be back in the Lord's house and, at the same time, do everything that was reasonable for the protection of those returning. For that reason, our plan to return to church is going to start as safely as we felt was reasonable. This does not mean that we cannot or will not ease precautions later on. ***It is an acknowledgment that it is more reasonable to start more safely as we return to worship and ease things later on, rather than to start less safely and try to add precautions later.*** To use the expression, "This is a marathon, not a sprint."
- 5) ***This means that we all need to have patience and forgiveness for one another.*** There may be things in our initial re-opening plan that you do not like or that you do not agree with. Don't we all wish none of these things were necessary! There may also be mistakes made by me, our leaders, or other members, or things we learn from and later change. ***Forgiveness and understanding for each other will be key*** as we learn what works best so that we may continue to receive God's gifts of Word and Sacrament together.
- 6) ***Please remember your brother and sister in Christ.*** The Apostle Paul reminds us, "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful... Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Cor. 10:23-24). And Jesus says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:39). Much of what we are asking everyone to do is to help keep one another safe. And by doing so, we look out for our neighbor's good and show love to one another. So, in other words, if I don't want to wear a mask to church, but I know it's important to my brother or sister in Christ so they feel safe, I'll do so out of love for them.
- 7) Things will seem strange at first—we haven't been in church for three months, that's strange! But also with our precautions we are taking, it will take a little getting used to. What's more, we hope the situation in Michigan will continue to improve and therefore things will become more "normal" in church. ***The most important thing to remember is that the Lord is in control and He is guiding us every single day.*** So, we do nothing out of fear, instead we wait on Him and we know things will happen in His timing.
- 8) In all of this, please remember why we're making this plan: ***so that we may begin the process of returning to in-person worship safely, receive God's good gifts of Word and Sacrament, and in the future, the Lord willing, we can slowly get back to some sense of normalcy.***

Thank you, and may God bless all of you.

In the Name of Our Risen and Ascended Lord,

Pastor Joe Polzin and Your Church Leaders
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Church Re-Opening Plan – June 11, 2020

Trinity and Mt. Hope Lutheran Churches, Gaylord and Grayling, Michigan

- 1) **Date for services to begin:** Weekend of June 20th-21st
- 2) **Service times at Mt. Hope:** Saturday at 5 pm and Sunday at 11 am (*Trinity Sat. 7 pm and Sun. 9 am*)
 - a. Capacity is estimated around 40 people based on our seating arrangement, so we will be encouraging all those who can come on Saturday evening to please do so.
 - i. (*Saturday services are only a temporary measure based on current circumstances. When we are able, we will be going back to only Sunday morning services.*)
- 3) **Arrival**
 - a. Doors will be propped open 30 minutes prior to service. Please consider coming a little early to help with proper spacing as people arrive.
 - b. While parking, as much as possible, please leave a space between your car and the next one.
 - c. You can walk and sit with your household, of course. Please maintain social distancing of six feet with everyone else. We ask that for the time being you please do not shake hands, hug, etc.
 - d. Enter via the front door only. There will be markings on the ground to help you keep proper spacing as you enter.
 - e. Masks/face coverings that cover both your nose and mouth will be required for the safety of others. Please bring your own mask, but the church will have some on hand for those who need one, as much as supplies are available.
 - i. If a health condition or concern prevents you from wearing a mask, please speak to Pastor during the week beforehand.
 - ii. It is advised that children under the age of 2 not wear masks. Parents are asked to help other children age 2 and up to the best of the child's ability, but of course, everyone will understand if that should not be possible.
 - f. Please stay home if you have or recently had any flu-like symptoms. Temperatures of worshipers will be checked at the entrance of the church with an infrared forehead thermometer. Anyone with a temperature exceeding 100.4 will be asked to refrain from entering church.
 - g. Please use hand sanitizer upon entering the church.
- 4) **Seating**
 - a. Ushers will help direct you where to sit, and worshipers will be seated from the front of the church to the back. If you need communion in your seat, you will be directed toward one of the front pews.
 - b. Every other pew row will be used for seating. Worshipers will be spread out around the sanctuary with six feet of spacing between worshipers/households that are in the same pew row.
 - c. The sanctuary, narthex, and restrooms will be used, but we ask that you please refrain from going to other parts of the church building so that we may more easily sanitize after every service.
- 5) **Worship**
 - a. Our service will be a simplified order of worship, similar to our current online service.
 - b. We will not have singing for the time being, but we will have some instrumental music played.
 - c. Holy Communion will be offered at every service.
 - d. A modified distribution of Communion will be administered that prioritizes social distancing and safe distribution from Pastor and an Elder. Instructions will be provided in the service.
- 6) **Dismissal**
 - a. Worshipers will be dismissed from the back of the church to the front.
 - b. We ask that you do not congregate in the church building to converse, but move directly outside away from the front door. Social distancing of six feet should still be maintained outside.
- 7) **Cleaning**
 - a. The sanctuary, pews, narthex, bathrooms, etc. will be sanitized after each worship service.