

September 21, 2020



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Dear First Lutheran Church Community,

To start off, thank you! Thank you for your ongoing and faithful support of First Lutheran and Luther Park Assisted Living and Memory Care while we work very hard to navigate our way through the various possibilities of how we might “Praise God, Nurture Faith, and Serve All” during this pandemic. Thank you for your patience as we learn how to do new things in new ways. Thank you!

**After a lot of prayerful consideration we will resume in-person worship at First Lutheran Church on Sunday, October 4, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. in the large sanctuary.**

This letter is quite lengthy. We hope that you will take the time to read it. It contains vital information we believe is important for you to know. If you have further questions, comments or concerns please feel free to call Pastor Lori at home: 208-255-4293.

The FLC Council and Pastors have been working really hard to identify the best ways to mitigate the risks associated with potentially sharing the COVID-19 virus. We have worked very hard, but the best we can do is reduce the chances that someone might contract this virus at First Lutheran. We cannot make worshipping together completely safe.

With that in mind please know that while we are beginning to welcome people into the sanctuary for a in-person worship experience, we in no way expect that everyone, or even most people will decide to join us in person on Sundays. We want you to make the best decisions you can for yourselves and the people you will come into contact with, including Luther Park. I am sure you have figured out over these past months, God does in-fact make house calls. Many of you have shared the amazing ways you have experienced God through the beauty of the earth and worship materials you have received.

Worshipping in-person is both a privilege and a responsibility. We hope that you will take both the privilege and the responsibility seriously.

**What is NOT changing:**

We will continue to offer online worship services on Sunday. We hope to record the Sunday service and post it to our YouTube Channel later in the day. We will let you know how to access new options. We will also continue to deliver worship packets with sermons, bulletins, and other resources for those people who do not have easy access to the internet. AND, we will continue to support, love and cherish everyone who decides that in-person worship is not yet something for them.

**What if there is a spike in new cases:**

At any time, up until Sunday Morning, we reserve the right to cancel in-person worship for health concerns. If there is a significant spike in new cases, if the health district says that the situation in

the county has changed dramatically for the worse, or if other new information emerges, we may need to cancel in-person worship to protect one another. We continue to constantly monitor the information available through the Panhandle Health District.

### **In-Person Worship is a Responsibility:**

When we decide to join with others for non-essential social or religious reasons, we are always taking a calculated risk. All actions in our lives bear risks for ourselves and others. Driving is an excellent example of this. When we choose to drive, we know that car accidents are very possible, so we choose not to drive when the risks are higher and don't outweigh the benefits (i.e. the icy roads we expect this winter). In a world where we have to deal with COVID-19, we are risking not only our own health — but because we have the potential of being, or becoming, an asymptomatic carrier — we are putting at risk the health of the people we will come into contact with.

If you know that you or someone you will come into contact with has a higher or high risk of developing complications from COVID-19, the risks likely will not outweigh the rewards of participating in our in-person worship services. If there is a good chance that you have been in contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive, or if you are experiencing any flu-like symptoms, the risk that you might bring COVID-19 with you to worship is not worth taking. In all of these cases we have to think not only of our own risk, but especially of the risk to others we will be worshipping with or visiting with at any time after we worship, especially Luther Park. We are trusting you to make wise choices with the risks you take.

### **In-person Worship is a Privilege:**

Throughout the past months I have become increasingly aware that we are very privileged to get to worship together in-person, in a sanctuary, as regularly as we do. Many people around the world do not experience this privilege because of political, economic, social, and health reasons. Many in our own congregation have for years had to deal with the reality that for health reasons, hearing loss, not being able to see, lack of transportation, and more; it simply was not possible for them to participate in worship on Sunday mornings. I pray we have gained a new appreciation of this privilege and are much more aware of what others deal with when this privilege is limited.

We really need our congregation to respect the expectations we are establishing for in-person worship. These expectations may seem onerous, but if we cannot work together to protect one another we will need to suspend in-person worship. This is a privilege, a wonderful life-giving, soul-filling, faithful privilege, but a privilege none-the-less.

### **Our Expectations for In-Person Worship Participants:**

- **If you have any flu-like symptoms**, a fever, lack of smell or taste or any of the other symptoms listed by the Panhandle Health District OR have likely been in contact with COVID-19, please stay home.
- **Wear masks throughout worship.** We have masks you can have. We know this is tricky with glasses, but we need you to wear masks. No exceptions.

- **We will not be shaking hands, hugging, or touching one another.** This is hard for us we know, but necessary.
- **Stay at least 6ft apart.** If you have a circle of contact, such as your household or friends you are already in regular contact with, please come to worship together. We will seat you together and you can be in closer proximity with those folks. Otherwise, please keep your distance from other groups or individuals.
- **Don't sing unless given explicit permission to do so.** If you simply can't make it through worship without singing along, it might be better to stay home and worship online so that you can belt out those hymns. It turns out singing and talking loudly are absolutely the best way to get respiratory viruses out of your lungs and suspended in the air for others to receive.
- **Take Your Allergy Meds.** Allergy symptoms can be very similar to flu-like symptoms. If you have a runny nose, are sneezing or have other flu-like symptoms we would like you to stay home. If allergy medications alleviate those symptoms, take your meds and you are welcome to attend medicated.
- **Dress for the weather.** The doors to the exterior will be wide open. Dress accordingly. We are looking into improving our HVAC system to address air quality in the sanctuary, but until then, add layers.
- **Arrive a little early.** Because of the seating precautions we are taking, it may take a little while to get everyone seated until we get used to this.
- **Be flexible.** You won't get to sit in "your seat." Please be willing to follow the instructions given when you arrive. We will seat from the front to the back. Best practices are constantly changing, so we all need to be flexible.
- **Be Gentle.** We know that there are lots of opinions about what is best for everyone. We would love to hear your thoughts, and we need you to be kind and honor the good faith efforts the Council and Pastors are making for our context.

### **What precautions are we taking?**

- **Creating a limited touch environment:** You will not need to touch doors, hymnals, or one another. Bulletins will be placed in pews the Thursday prior to worship by a gloved, masked person. Bathrooms will be limited to 1 family unit at a time.
- **Sanitizing Surfaces:** We will have volunteers and/or staff sanitize all of the surfaces in the common spaces prior to and after worship. Bottles of hydrogen peroxide are available in bathrooms for you to use.
- **Requiring social distancing:** We will seat each contact group at least 6 feet from one another, clearly sectioned off. Please arrive with the people that are part of your circle of contact, if you would like to be seated together. This means family or friends you agree are practicing the same social distancing practices and in your "bubble".
- **Providing Masks:** Because everyone will be expected to wear masks, we are providing hand-sewn masks (pre-packaged) for those who do not own a mask or forget theirs at home.

- **Providing Hand sanitizer:** We will ask everyone to sanitize their hands as they enter the building. Two entrances available (Ontario Automatic Door and Doors nearest the Office)
- **Limiting Seating Capacity:** We are limiting the number of people that will be seated in the sanctuary. If there is overflow, audio will be available in the fellowship hall. We also may put a reservation process in place, once we sense the need.
- **Increased Exchange of Air in worship spaces:** We hope to invest in an “air scrubber” for the sanctuary HVAC system and do duct work to create outside air intake. Until then, we will also be keeping windows and doors open with fans. This does mean the temperature control will be limited.
- **No Holy Communion until we can determine a low risk means of sharing the Lord’s Supper:** We will update you once we find a way we feel comfortable leading.
- **Keeping a record of who attends worship:** We will be making sure that we know the names and phone numbers of everyone who attends worship. This is to inform attendees of any potential contact with COVID-19, as soon as possible.
- **No Fellowship Time:** When fellowship does return, it will look and feel different than coffee hour did. Once outside, you can talk with face coverings and proper spacing.

### How can you help?

- **We need ushers/greeters:** If you are healthy, at lower-risk of COVID-19 complications, and not coming into contact with high risk people, we need ushers who are willing to be trained in our new procedures. Several of the Council Members have volunteered, but we could use more. A coordinator is also needed to make sure four healthy volunteers are available and trained for each Sunday. Without ushers, all the rest is impossible. If you are willing to help e-mail or call Pastor Lori or the office right away.
- **Assist with Worship?** We would like people to record themselves doing readings, leading a song, or other activities. Also, Pastor Lori is looking for worship planners to help with song selection, visual creations for bulletins and online worship, and other creative options for Sunday worship and to support our Praise of God beyond this time. Please let her know if you are willing to help with any of this. Also, if you can create additional cloth masks, they are appreciated.

Thank you for reading all of this information. Looking out for one another and keeping Christ at our center is being the church. I pray that within these boundaries, we can create and discover new ways to Praise God, Nurture Faith, and Serve All with the Spirit as our guide.

Peace to you in Christ,

*Pastor Lori*

Rev. Lori C. Morton

[flcpastorlori@icloud.com](mailto:flcpastorlori@icloud.com)

Home Phone 208-255-4293