



## St. Peter's Lutheran Church

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July 1, 2020

Dear St. Peter's members and friends,

Back in March, we sent a letter to all of you with details about the closure of the church building and our plans for staying connected in the time of coronavirus, including using the technology available to us to worship through YouTube and Facebook. I closed that letter saying, “Whenever we can be together as a church family again, it will indeed be a shared experience of resurrection.”

While I still believe this to be true, it's safe to say that I had no idea what would actually be involved in coming together again, and I know I'm not alone. It turns out that the process of closing the building and moving worship online was actually much simpler than the process for re-opening the building and resuming in-person worship!

Through the hard work of physical distancing, staying at home, and wearing masks, our area has been relatively successful in slowing the spread of the virus. We have progressed to the point where we can cautiously begin gathering for worship in person again, with a number of modifications.

I know this is exciting news for many, but let me be clear. The virus is still present in our communities and spreading quickly in other parts of our country. We cannot pretend as though everything is “back to normal” without risking going backwards. Experts are predicting a second wave of COVID-19, but we have the power to minimize that risk in our area if we do things wisely now.

Council and staff are planning to resume in-person worship on **Sunday, July 12**, following a new schedule and format. **Please, if you are in a high-risk group, are not feeling well, or may have been exposed to the coronavirus, we ask you to only attend the online worship.**

**First: There will be a brief in-person worship in the sanctuary at 10:00 am.**

- To minimize exposure, this service will be a briefer version of what we have been offering online. It will include instrumental music, but no singing. Singing is one of the most dangerous activities due to the number of droplets that come out of a singer's mouth and how far they travel.
- Your household's seats will be assigned in order to ensure physical distance of six feet in all directions. Please do not move elsewhere after being escorted to your seat. This means you may be seated somewhere other than your “usual” pew.

- The maximum attendance for this service is 44 people. This is the maximum we can accommodate at this time and still ensure the necessary distancing.
- You will need to RSVP for this service to ensure you have an assigned seat. Kathy Piemonte in the office will be accepting RSVPs on a weekly basis and you must call no later than Friday at 1:00 pm for the coming Sunday's service. No standing reservations or advance reservations will be accepted. If that Sunday's service is full, you will be placed on the list for the following Sunday.
- Please enter and exit through the main entrance with the double doors only. Other doors will be locked from the outside at this time. If you need to use the accessible parking spots, please note that when you RSVP for the service. Because we are only offering one worship service in-person at this time, we have opted not to have a separate "exit only" door, but we may in the future.
- As you enter the building, a greeter will check your name off and check your temperature. Your temperature must be under 100 degrees to enter and you must also wear a face covering that completely covers your nose and mouth. **No mask means no worship.** If you are in need of a reusable cloth mask, please contact the office. We will also have paper masks available at the door if you forgot yours.
- Instead of using a prayer clipboard, prayer concerns to be lifted up on Sunday morning should be conveyed ahead of time through a phone call or email to the person assigned to lead prayers on a particular Sunday. Prayer concerns must be received no later than 6:00 pm on Saturday evening. A schedule of prayer leaders will be published ahead of time.
- The entire service will be contained in a printed bulletin. No hymnals or Bibles will be available in the pews, and cushions will be removed. (Another reason this service will be brief!)
- After the service, an usher will come to escort your household to the door. Please remain seated until you are ushered out. Congregating in the narthex or fellowship hall will not be allowed before or after worship, and coffee hour will not be available. Any socializing should be done outside and from a distance. Being outside greatly reduces the risk of spreading the virus.
- Restrooms will be monitored and wiped down after each person. The accessible bathroom will be the only one available in order to make this feasible. We recommend using the restroom at your home whenever possible.
- An offering plate will be placed at the sanctuary entrance to receive your offerings. If you prefer, you may continue to mail your offerings to the office or give via PayPal.
- The passing of the peace will be limited to a gesture and greeting between the pastor and the people. Please do not move to greet others.
- I will not be shaking hands or doing intense socializing before or after the worship service. Please know that this is not a sign of how I feel about you! I care about you and am glad to see you, but I am also committed to doing everything I can to keep you well.
- I know this will be difficult for the huggers, but please, save your hugs for another time! Not everyone in your church family is comfortable hugging, touching or shaking hands

right now. Out of love and respect for your brothers and sisters, please find another way to communicate that you care from a distance.

- At this time we have not finalized a plan for sharing the meal of Holy Communion, although that will hopefully be coming soon.

**Also: We will continue to offer an online worship service.**

- This service will continue to offer “sing-along” hymns, a longer format and interactive chat similar to we have been offering for the past three months. If singing is an important part of worship for you, this may be the best service for you to attend.
- It will continue to be approximately 45-50 minutes in length. We hope to set it up ahead of time to premiere on YouTube and Facebook at **9:00 am**, with live interaction. If that turns out to not be possible, we will plan to offer it live at **11:00 am**, immediately after the in-person service. You can visit our Facebook page or YouTube channel beforehand to see the scheduled time that week and sign up to get a reminder.
- It will allow you to worship in the comfort of your own home with a minimum of restrictions. If you have issues with wearing a mask, or other reasons why the restrictions for the in-person service will be a hardship for you, online worship may be a better choice for you right now.
- You are welcome to attend the in-person worship service and then also tune into the online service from home if you wish.
- Because we will be preparing this service earlier in the week, prayer concerns to be lifted up in this service need to be received by the assigned prayer leader no later than Wednesday at 6:00 pm. A schedule of prayer leaders will be published ahead of time. (Remember that even if your prayer concern is not spoken aloud, God still hears it!)
- Once we have a plan in place for sharing Holy Communion in person, I hope to extend the table to include Communion for our online worship service as well, for those who desire it.

**At other times:**

Council has decided that until further notice, the building will remain closed to outside groups while we focus on re-starting in-person worship. This will allow us time to establish new procedures and keep the in-person contact to a minimum. The office will be open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 am to 2:00 pm for both remote access and in-person assistance (please call ahead to let Kathy know you are coming). Please be sure to keep physical distance, and please wear a mask and use hand sanitizer before entering the offices. There will be a clipboard by the doorway and everyone entering the building is asked to sign in and out for contact tracing purposes. If you have a key and you need to enter for a specific reason, you may, but please do sign in and out and keep it brief.

If someone who has been in the building tests positive for the coronavirus, we will be notifying the health department as well as the staff and congregation as soon as possible, while also maintaining confidentiality. Knowing who has been in the building and when they were there will give us an important advantage in cases like these.

As we go forward, we will be evaluating and possibly making adjustments to slowly open up more while still ensuring everyone's safety. However, there may be times in the coming weeks and months when your worship experience feels more sterile and clinical than before, and times when my tone may sound more like a disciplinarian than your pastor. Please remember that my concern for following these rules comes from my love and care for all of you. In the body of Christ, everyone has a part to play to keep each other healthy. Together we have the power to promote life and wellness for all of us.

I know this has been a lot of information to process. I hope it proves to be helpful as a reference point rather than overwhelming you. I know we are all tired of living this way, but unfortunately, viruses do not get tired. Together we can defeat this virus by continuing to demonstrate our love in new and powerful ways, and with God's help, together we will get through this.

Together in Christ,

Pastor Katie Yahns  
on behalf of the Council

P.S. Thank you to everyone for your faithful and generous support over the last three months! Without it we would be facing a very different reality right now. Council and I are so very grateful for your cards, letters, prayers, donations, offerings, pledges, and volunteered time. St. Peter's is a truly exceptional congregation and I am proud to be your pastor.

Also, if you have responded to the call in the Chatter and Pulse to create butterflies for the Alleluia banner, please bring them to church on July 12<sup>th</sup> or send them to the church office. Thank you!