

June 15th, 2021

Dear people of Living Christ,

A new season in our life together is dawning at Lutheran Church of the Living Christ! This letter serves to announce the return to in-person worship in the sanctuary, beginning Sunday, June 27, 2021. Safety guidelines follow this letter so that you know what to expect as we gather in this way.

As we move forward, we also look back at where we have been. When the decision was made 15 months ago to suspend in-person gathering and move worship online, we did so out of care for our neighbor and the vulnerable among us. This has been a time marked by sacrifice as we have carefully made decisions about the health and safety of our entire community.

This was not always an easy choice. There has been much grief and loss. Things have died in this season of uncertainty: the ways we were used to being in community together, Feed My Starving Children packs, making music together, communion around one table, many of our regular service projects, and even our ways of belonging.

At the same time, we have also been witnesses to new life springing up all around. Because we were forced into an entirely new way of operating, we have fully embraced the opportunities and limitations of gathering virtually via Zoom. We have discovered what it can mean to belong to one another from a distance. We have encountered the musical gifts and offerings of those outside of our congregation. We have learned to be flexible and have experimented as we tried to further our witness and mission outside the walls of our building.

As a new chapter begins, we will carry forward the lessons we have learned over this last season. We will also hold space for the many emotions that will accompany our return to in-person gatherings. Of course, there will be great joy! Joy will be known as we see familiar faces, even over the top of a mask, and the feel of familiar pews in our place of worship. Joy will be known in the sharing of bread and wine and music within the assembly.

We expect that there will also be great sadness. Sadness will be known as we recognize the faces no longer with us – the faithful saints who have finished their pilgrimage with us and rest in God's promises. Grief will be felt as we remember the ways we've been unable to hold it together this past year in community. Anxiety and fear will be

experienced as we emerge from a season of isolation to being around groups of people for the first time. Our worship, like just about everything else in our lives, will look and feel different than it did before COVID-19, and that might be uncomfortable at first.

We expect that families and households will make different decisions based on their own needs and the needs of those around them. Our levels of comfort around one another will be different and will vary from person to person – and that's okay!

Through the joy and through the sadness, we pray: that we can compassionately bear with one another; that we can give one another the space and grace to feel all the mixed feelings that will come with our return to worship. As your pastor, I am here for you in this new season in whatever way I can be. I'm here to listen and discern with you the feelings that arise in the months to come. I am fully vaccinated and will be resuming in-person pastoral care with precautions. I will be delighted to see you in-person or virtually, so please reach out if you would like to talk.

Moving forward, we will continue to offer a variety of opportunities for worship, connection, and community-building through online, in-person, and hybrid modes. Even as we return to worship in the sanctuary, the service will continue to be offered via Zoom.

In these coming days, we continue to be guided by Jesus' command to love God and love our neighbors. This love of neighbor will be known through our actions. Our in-person, indoor gatherings will require masking so that anyone can join us for worship, regardless of vaccination status. Please do get your vaccine if you are able and keep encouraging others to get vaccinated as they are able. These practices are how we fulfill God's call to compassion and mercy in this time.

In Christ,

Pastor Melissa Woepfel

Guidelines for resuming worship in the sanctuary beginning 6/27/21

- Masking will be required for the assembly; worship leadership will not be masked when they are speaking
- You may choose to sit where you like and there will be not capacity limitations
- For now, we will sing only the last song of the service
- As you enter the sanctuary you will be able to drop off your offering and pick up prepackaged communion supplies and bulletins.
- During the service, communion and peace will remain distanced (you will stay in your pew/seat). Offering plates and pew cards will not be passed around.
- Fellowship after service will take place outside; for now, there will be no adult forum/coffee and donuts, etc.
- Zoom will continue to be available as a way to worship