

Returning to Worship Safely: Safety Committee/Council Decisions

God's blessings to you who have been part of the body of Christ and yet isolated from brothers and sisters who are also part of this fellowship of believers at St. John/St. Stephen Lutheran Parish.

With great joy I announce that we *hope and plan* to open for public worship on Sunday, August 2nd. For 17 weeks our buildings have been closed because of COVID-19, and I have to say that our "new normal" will feel very different. The best way to "love your neighbor" is to take safety precautions that will protect all of us, hopefully, from the coronavirus. As I write this, the surging numbers of the second wave are just beginning to retreat.

When we first went into "lock-down" in mid-March, I think most of us believed it would be a severe but short-lived experience. It was difficult to think it might last as long as the health experts were predicting. But now that our "old normal" is beyond our reach for many more months, we've been seeking a way to allow our congregations to gather for worship with minimum risk. The following guidelines were adopted by St. John's Council, at the recommendation of the Safety Committee, on July 9th, and by St. Stephen's Council on July 15th.

1. Stay-home requirements:

- a. Fever above 100.4 degrees (before aspirin/Tylenol)**
- b. Chills**
- c. Congestion or runny nose**
- d. Diarrhea**
- e. Nausea or vomiting**
- f. Sore throat**
- g. New loss of taste or smell**
- h. Headache**
- i. Muscle or body aches**
- j. Fatigue**
- k. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing**

- 2. Maximum attendance: 50**
- 3. Masks required for all but children 2 and under**
- 4. Social distancing (6') required (except for family units)**
- 5. Please enter St John on west side, *St. Stephen at doors closest to 3rd St*, where a “safety station will provide sanitizers and masks (if needed)**
- 6. Sanitize hands before being seated**
- 7. Please don't socialize in narthex or sanctuary**
- 8. You will be handed all worship materials by someone with shield and gloves; this person will also hand you items from your mail box or place items in another box**

It will look and feel different, but following these measures gives us the greatest chance of protection from the coronavirus, which can be deadly for many people.

There will be additional instructions for the worship service itself: no singing (you may hum); no coffee hour or any other exchange of food; offering should be dropped in baskets between the narthex and the sanctuary. As you enter you'll be handed a bulletin and communion kit by a greeter with shield or safety glasses and gloves, and your presence will be recorded in case we need to “track” an exposure to COVID-19; communion will be by hygienically sealed packets containing wafer and juice—all will open their communion kits at the same time and we'll receive together. You'll be asked to take with you your bulletin and used communion ware.

I'm sure there'll be changes made once we start in-person worship. We ask you to be patient as we settle into our new normal. Council is open to additional suggestions for safety matters, and I (Pr. Gail) am open to worship suggestions.

Looking forward to seeing you beginning August 2nd—our ***Easter*** celebration!

May God's perfect peace be with you!