



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Dear people of Trinity,

Grace and peace be with you on this Ascension Day. As I begin to write, I think of the words of Paul in Philippians 1: “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...” I so love and appreciate the ways that God has tied us together, and given us to one another as companions on this journey of faith.

I write to you this day to update you on the work the Council and I have been doing to review and address the continuing absence we have from congregational worship. Over the past few weeks, Council and I have read through documents provided by the Lower Susquehanna Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as well as reviewed the Pennsylvania “Process to Reopen Pennsylvania” and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines surrounding the reopening process. We have also developed a Task Force to work through these details and explore the impact these would have on our worship service.

As many of you know, Adams County moves to the Yellow Zone of the PA Reopening Process on Friday, May 22nd, changing some of the restrictions that we currently abide by. In the Yellow Zone, gatherings are limited to 25 people, masks and strict cleaning and hygiene procedures continue, and, recognizing the risk of these actions, we are asked by Bishop Dunlop and the ELCA to refrain from singing, Communion, and Baptism for the time being as well. It is good and right that we consider these restrictions, and take them on ourselves as a means to protect and aid our neighbors in every way.

The Council and I have wrestled with what this means for in-person worship. After careful consideration and conversation, we have discerned that it is best continue to abstain from in-person worship as we enter the Yellow-Zone. This means that there will not be in-person worship throughout June. We will continue to offer at-home worship materials, and we will continue to pick up this question as new information comes in, always looking for what is best for our neighbors and ourselves. The Task Force will continue to meet as well, proactively making plans for cleaning and hygiene procedures so that we are able to address our new needs when the time is right to invite all back.

I imagine some may be disappointed, some may understand, and many may experience both just as I do. As I shared with Council, I will share with you – when we open our doors as a church, we do so claiming to be a safe space in every way. We claim that all people may walk through the door and vulnerably open themselves to the experience of being in the presence of God and the body of Christ. We work hard to make sure this is true emotionally and spiritually, and actively address moments when we fail. We must also work just as tirelessly to be sure this is true physically. When the church doors open, we must do our best to ensure the space is safe, and work to address ways in which it may not be. After all, the space is not ours, and the people are not ours. It all belongs to the Shepherd, who lays down everything, including his life, for the sheep.

Know that we are also exploring ways in which we might regain a sense of our social nature – be it online worship opportunities, Zoom based social hours, phone calls, or other means of connecting. We miss one another dearly, and it is important to address this. Should you have ideas in this area, feel free to reach out!

Thank you for your continued support, prayers, and good will toward your neighbors. The world always longs for this, and needs the love of God in deep, deep ways.

May the same love that moved over the waters of creation, was born as Jesus of Nazareth, and swept over the church at Pentecost move and sweep over you on this and every day.

Peace,

Pastor Ben Siebert

Referenced Documents:

Lower Susquehanna Synod, May 4th Letter from Bishop Dunlop: <https://www.lss-elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Bishop-Dunlop-Reopening-Guidelines-posted-05-04-2020.pdf>

ELCA, Considerations for Returning to In-Person Worship: <https://elca.org/publichealth>

Process to Reopen Pennsylvania: <https://www.governor.pa.gov/process-to-reopen-pennsylvania/>

CDC Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>