

May 27, 2020

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all is well with you, even as your soul is getting along well (III John 2).

When Governor Walz mandated that churches refrain from meeting back in March, our Consistory humbly submitted in order to be obedient to God's instructions as found in Romans 13 and I Peter 2. However, as the Governor is lifting the restrictions put in place to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus while the medical field prepared themselves for an influx of patients, we believe the Spirit is inviting us to begin worshipping in person.

Therefore, after 10 weeks of worshipping at home, we are cautiously excited about reopening our doors to the congregation and the community on Sunday, May 31st! In order to best care for everyone's health during this pandemic, we are sending this information so you can know what to expect should you choose to join us.

While everyone's health and safety is of utmost importance to us, because of the contagious nature of the virus, there will be risk involved in joining for worship. The Centers for Disease Control has informed the American citizens repeatedly, if you are in the high risk category for COVID-19 or other illness, that it might be in your best interest to avoid large gatherings. However, if you are willing to assume the risk, you are welcome to join us. Our desire is not to micro manage you; however we do encourage you to make wise and considerate choices for yourself and for others, especially if you are not feeling well. And we have adopted the following guidelines.

When you arrive, you may use any entrance, except the north entrance. You will be greeted by a Consistory member who will open the door for you. Part of our effort to provide a safe environment is to minimize the number of surfaces that you touch. The valet parking will not be available. Masks will not be provided or required, but please feel free to wear one if you so desire. There will be no shame for those who choose to wear a mask or for those who choose not to. Hand sanitizer will be available in a variety of locations. The bathrooms will be available for use.

Once you are inside, you may check your mailbox for your bulletin, or bulletins will be available from the ushers who will seat you. Other than a friendly greeting to whomever you meet, we are asking you to refrain from person to person contact and from gathering with friends before the service, but rather go directly to your seat. The nursery will be closed. We plan on using the "six foot distancing" guideline so you will be ushered in and out of the worship service. Again our goal is to leave ample space between families and individuals while adhering to the twenty-five percent limit capacity. Overflow seating will be available in the Fellowship Hall. We thank you in advance for your gracious cooperation if you are unable to sit in your favorite spot ☺.

You may place your offering in the offering plates by the Worship Center entrances either before or after our time of worship. If you prefer, you may continue to give online or by automatic withdrawal from your bank. We will not be taking time for an offering during the service therefore the children will not come forward for the children's offering, but can place their gifts in the designated baskets. Although there is some concern about the safety of singing, at this point we are not asking you to refrain.

We also recognize that one of the main reasons we gather for worship is to connect with family and friends. We are not prohibiting such gathering after the worship service, however we are asking you to practice safe physical distancing and that parents keep your children by your side. Weather permitting; gathering in open spaces outside would be a great option. At this time we will not be serving coffee or cookies before or after the service.

To be clear: This invitation to the congregation to gather for worship is in no way a requirement, expressed or implied. If you do not feel comfortable joining with a large gathering of people, we give you our blessing should you choose to continue watching online or on local cable channel 3 until you discern it is safe for you to join us.

We acknowledge that this is new and different for all of us and that it could be this way for quite some time. We also understand there are strong differences of opinions on whether gathering in large groups is wise. We are looking forward to the day when there will be minimal risk of catching the COVID-19 virus. However, until then your Consistory respectfully asks for your humble cooperation, your patience, and a grace filled response as we seek to walk by the Spirit, especially as we may need to reevaluate procedures and make weekly adjustments.

We also realize our decision may result in persecution for you from people in our community. Should that be the case, please be grace-filled in your responses and if necessary, direct their concerns to Pastor Mike or one the Consistory members.

We are grateful for everyone who has been a part of broadcasting our weekly worship service online and to all of you who have faithfully joined us. Please continue to pray for us that we would lead in a manner that would be pleasing to God. As always, feel free to contact the office or Consistory member for clarity on an issue.

We close with these sentiments from the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 1:3).

Grace to you and shalom,

ARC Consistory

Recap/Highlights: Beginning May 31

- If you do not feel well, please STAY HOME!
- North entrance will be closed
- No valet parking
- No nursery
- Masks – your choice
- Hand sanitizer will be available
- Seating – 6 ft apart; ushers will seat you
- Offering plates will be at the back of the Worship Center
- Please be humble, flexible, and grace-filled