



April 30, 2020

Our Savior Lutheran Church Family,

*“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”* (Philippians 1:3-6)

You’ve likely heard that our state government is beginning to lift restrictions on worship gatherings (with some necessary precautions). And you’re probably wondering how this impacts our ability to gather in person for worship services. I’m sure that a wide variety of opinions also exist even among OSLC members regarding when and how we should do so.

Our church leadership is actively working on a plan for re-entry, with plans for significant discussion over the weekend. This re-entry plan will rely on all the gifts God has given us for making wise, informed decisions. As always, this means humility, prayer, and patient discussion. In this specific situation, this means we also seek the counsel of both government officials and medical professionals.

The purpose of this letter is not to share our plan. We’re not there yet. Once we are, we’ll be sure to let you know immediately. Rather, the purpose of this letter is to communicate something more important than the decision itself – namely, the way in which we think about difficult decisions and the unity in Christ we are called to embody before, during, and after such decisions. I would say that to be unified in our love and support for one another is far more important than decisions about our re-entry.

As the Apostle Paul reminded the church in Corinth, even if he had perfect faith and wisdom, if he still lacked love, he has gained nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3). These words apply to our situation as well. Whether we gather sooner or later in person, what really matters is that we’re unified in love for one another. To gather at the right time without love that is “patient and kind” means we’ve gathered in worship for the wrong reasons altogether.

With that said, I want to highlight some important points that shape our thinking as we move toward a plan:

1. Eventually we will return to normal worship. Be assured of this. God’s plan for worship and Christian life is that we would meet together in person. To be a Christian is a very “in person” thing. In other words, while we are thankful that we’re able to worship God in our living rooms, this is not ideal. We’ve been worshipping with gusto, reverence, and faithfulness in our living rooms for several weeks, but we’re always longing for our sanctuary and those who fill it, and for our altar and those who kneel at it.

2. Even after we're able to gather, our return to "normal" worship will likely take time. None of us have lived through a pandemic. We don't fully know what the next months will look like. Even when we're able to gather in person, we will need to exercise caution. This will be tricky. In my discussions with other church leaders, no one feels absolutely confident as to how to best proceed. Your church leaders need your prayers and support.
3. We are people who value both the Third Commandment (remember the Sabbath) and the Fifth Commandment (you shall not murder). We deeply value worship and the protection of human life. Both of these commandments are black and white, but how we apply them in daily life during a pandemic is more nuanced. We long to gather as soon as we can, but not sooner than we should.
4. Decisions about gathering are deeply personal for many OSLC members. Our circumstances, experiences, and even our political beliefs will shape the way we approach lifted restrictions. Our church consists of brothers and sisters in Christ who have experienced both financial stability and deep financial distress, those who are in good health and those who have a genuine concern for their well-being, those who are angered by government restrictions and those who find them reasonable. With all of these differences, we are still held together by the unchanging love of Christ, and we cannot allow such differences to divide us. Additionally, you may see other churches in our city, state, and country gathering together in some fashion immediately. As in all other circumstances in life, be joyful for them that their particular situation has allowed them to gather; please join me in praying for not only their continued protection but also for our protection and a return to our church.

In summary, if you feel that our re-entry plan is too slow, we encourage you to see the bigger picture. The potential weeks of in-person worship that you lack may mean the health and peace of mind of your brother or sister in Christ. And if you feel that our re-entry plan moves too quickly, we encourage you to move at your own pace. If you do not feel safe, please know that we will continue to make our online worship available. There are also worship audio CDs for those with no access to the internet.

I have prayed many prayers during this season – prayers for mental and physical health, for the comfort of those living in isolation, for the pressures felt by families adjusting to new schedules and demands, and for our medical professionals, first responders, and government officials. However, the greatest and most consistent prayer I have prayed is that our church would come out on the other side of this crisis with deeper roots in Christ. My hope is that God will have done a good work in us – one that may not have taken place in us when life was normal.

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Heath Trampe