

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On behalf of Congregation Council, I hope this message still finds you in good health. Over the past several days, your Bethlehem Worship Committee and Council have been diligently planning ways to safely return to physical worship. We have applied guidance from various health department and synod resources to determine a working framework for what physical worship will look like at BLC for the foreseeable future. I want to extend a heartfelt **THANK YOU** to the Worship Committee for providing Council with very comprehensive and well-prepared recommendations for discussion.

Your safety was our north star when we discussed the framework for resuming physical worship. Physical church services will look and feel very different going forward until a vaccine or effective treatment for COVID-19 is available. A high-level summary is listed below to give you a sense of the protections we are putting in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission at Bethlehem.

**In-Person Service will resume no earlier than mid-June, possibly later.** The “main event” will still be the YouTube Livestream Service. The exact start-date will be re-evaluated by Council next at the end of May, once the effects of state/county re-opening are better understood.

1. Services offered (exact start date TBD):
  - a. Sunday In-Person Simple Spoken Word Service (no singing) at 9:00am
  - b. Sunday YouTube Livestream (Full Music & Liturgy) at 11:00am
  - c. Additional In-Person Services may be introduced with increased interest and after gaining experience with new model
2. No contact communion will occur following strict hygiene practices. Home communion kits will be distributed when material become available.
3. Face coverings, social distancing (e.g. restricted seating), and sanitization practices will be enforced.
4. Nursery/Childcare services will not be provided.
5. In-Person Youth and Adult Sunday School will not take place.

We each have a part of the service that is most sacred to us and evokes our purest sense of spirituality and closeness with God. After reading these recommendations, you may be experiencing a feeling of loss. I will personally share mine: No singing. Wait, No singing! How can we not sing at Bethlehem? Singing creates beautiful music, but also casts potentially virus-laden aerosols even further than 6 feet and causes us to inhale air more deeply (hence those aerosols go more deeply into our lungs). Even if wearing a mask, singing is not safe in the presence of many. This recommendation aligns with synod guidance. Whether it is the singing or something else, it is OK to grieve what was our way of doing things. Out of that mourning we may find a new connection with God.

I think we have all been reminded that the building is not the church. We are the church and Bethlehem Lutheran Church is *still at work!* The next step will be a short 4-5 question survey to assist us in more detailed planning for physical worship. Additionally, how to safely conduct the Annual Meeting on June 7<sup>th</sup> is proving to be a very difficult challenge; council is still working through this issue. Stay tuned.

Until the time that we can all safely worship together in our beautiful sanctuary, let us continue to share the peace of God virtually.

Stay Healthy and Safe,  
Stephanie Levine  
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Indianapolis, IN