

January 22, 2021

This is a revised version of the October 2020 letter

Dear Bethlehem Community,

With joy we announce that the Transition Committee of the Congregation Council has decided to return to in-person Sunday worship beginning Sunday, February 28, at 9:30 AM. This decision is being made in light of current COVID testing results for the City of Chicago. We will continue to monitor relevant COVID metrics and will suspend in-person worship if positive test rates increase (above 5.5%) or the Congregation Council otherwise decides it is unsafe for our parishioners and/or the greater Bethlehem community. But, for now, we are pleased to offer this option. We have been hard at work for the past several months putting together a plan to create a safe and meaningful worship experience. That being said, while safety measures will be in place, gathering always carries a risk. For this reason, we will continue to live stream our services and strongly encourage those who feel safer worshiping from home to continue to participate virtually.

For those who do return to in-person worship, things will look very different from a pre-COVID Sunday morning. Each and every one of us will play an important role in protecting the health and well-being of our neighbors. Please read this letter carefully so that you know what to expect and what will be expected of you.

- Attendance at the services will be limited. All worshipers are required to pre-register. The registration form can be filled out at Bethlehem's web site (www.bethlehem-chicago.org) beginning the Monday before the scheduled service. Those unable to complete the online form can call the church office for assistance.
- Worshipers are not to attend if they have recently been diagnosed with COVID, exhibit symptoms of COVID, or have recently traveled to one of the "hot spots" as designated by Chicago's Emergency Travel Order.
- All worshipers will wear face coverings at all times, except when receiving communion.
- Worshipers are to keep a social distance of at least 6 feet between themselves and others not in their household. Pews will be marked for social distance.
- Worshipers are asked to arrive at least 10 minutes before the worship service begins to allow time for the check in process. Worshipers will enter (and exit) through the designated entrance. While snow is on the ground, this will be the 94th street side door. When the way is clear, people will enter through the double red doors. Upon entry they will have their temperature taken, check in with the usher, and pick up their bulletin and pre-wrapped communion elements. These will be set out 72 hours before worship.
- Worshipers are strongly encouraged to use hand sanitizer (provided) before entering the worship space.
- Worshipers will not sing during the service. Shared spoken responses to the liturgy will be limited. We have worked hard to plan a meaningful liturgy, even without these elements.
- Worshipers will remain in their pew throughout the service. Hugs, handshakes, and fist bumps will not be offered to those outside of one's household during the sharing of the peace. Communion will be received in the pew using the pre-packaged elements. After the postlude, worshipers will be ushered from their pew.

- Worshipers are strongly encouraged to make their regular donation via electronic giving.
- Worshipers are limited to the worship and narthex area while in the building. The family washroom will be available, if needed. The nursery will be closed.
- Worshipers are not to linger in the sanctuary or narthex before or after worship.

We know that this is not the community gathering to which we are accustomed. Yet as much as we long to visit together over coffee and greet one another with handshakes and hugs, we still know that our love for one another is strong. We also know that the primary purpose of our gathering each week is to worship God, put our needs in God's hands, and be strengthened for our work in the world. Whether we gather in the building or online, we know that God is still faithfully working in our lives.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, congregational president Tricia Krohmer, or transition committee chair Russ Chibe.

Peace, Pastor Jennie