



Ascension Lutheran Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Christina Auch, Pastor

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Grace and peace to you.

One of the creative outcomes of the pandemic is a series of parodies of favorite children's books. Favorite titles from Dr. Seuss and other children's writers are included and one of my favorites is "Alexander and the Horrible, No Good, Very Bad 2020." There are certainly times when I want to throw a tantrum and yell as loud as I can because it is hard to be apart and even harder to plan for our life together when we gather again.

On March 22 I shared with you that we would not gather again in person through at least Sunday, May 10. Earlier hopes that we could reunite with an Easter-like breakfast or potluck, and worship together in the sanctuary, celebrating Holy Communion with freshly baked bread and shouts of thanksgiving have been tempered by public health guidelines that suggest a very gradual return to gathering in numbers of greater than 10. Sometime in April I realized that even as the stay at home order eases in North Carolina, we will not be flipping a switch and returning to church as we knew it.

I love church as we knew it and that breaks my heart.

On Saturday the NC Synod Council met and shared their recommendations for beginning to transition to in-person gatherings again. In their recommendations they said:

- The NC Synod Council extends the no-gatherings in person of more than 10 in NC Synod congregations guideline and expectation through at least May 31.
- The NC Synod Council will appoint a Task Force to produce a document/process to flesh out what in-person re-gathering in congregations and worship might look like.

Considering those recommendations as well as guidance from church bodies and state officials, Ascension's congregation council discussed when we may gather again and what it may look like. Aware that a majority of our regular worshiping community are over 65 years old **we believe it is good care for our neighbor and for each of you to suspend gathering face to face or in person through at least Sunday, May 31.** However, even as we look

forward to June, if North Carolina and Cleveland County particularly see increased infection or mortality rates from COVID-19, we will reevaluate what is possible and any decisions we make will comply with state guidelines also.

As we face a third month apart, Saint Paul's words to the church in Rome reassure me. He writes,

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ... knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

While we are writing all future plans in pencil because we cannot predict what congregation life will look like when we are reunited, we know that some practices will change. There are questions around the need for masks and disinfectant, how to safely physically distance in pews, whether communal singing is safe, and how to worship without any physical touch which affects communion practices, the passing of the peace, and even how we enter and exit the sanctuary. We look forward to having the Synod's task force recommendations when they are made available as we try to imagine church together in this new age.

Please know that your congregation council and I have made these decisions with the best information we have this week. I appreciate how unsettling and frustrating the isolation, disruption and uncertainty are. We will continue to record and broadcast evening prayer on weekday evenings, Bible study and Sunday worship and wait for the day when we can gather safely together again.

May God's love comfort and sustain you.

In Christ,

Pastor Christina

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An Expression and Extension of God's Grace in the Shelby Area