

## From the Interim Senior Pastor

By this point in my tenure as St. Andrew's interim pastor, I had assumed that I would have gotten to know the many in the congregation that have come here since 2007, when I left to serve as our synod's bishop. That hasn't been the case. Just two weeks after beginning this work, we had to stop meeting in person. I have come to know a few of you as well as one can through the frequent Zoom council and committee meetings; still, this interim has not worked out as we had expected.

You would not be surprised to know that in nearly every conversation I have with St. Andrew folk, the question of when we will be able to worship again comes up. From those conversations I know that the things we seem to miss the most are singing together, the Eucharist, and simply being together. I also know that most of us are past ready to meet together again but that we don't want to do so until we can do that without endangering each other's health.

Our COVID-19 advisory group has been helpful in taking an objective look at the reality in which we are all living these days. At the August council meeting they presented a series of considerations for the council as that body discerns when and how we may safely meet for worship and other gatherings.

Council has asked that group to work with the staff toward some kind of re-gathering soon, we hope sometime in October. A decision about when that might be and what kind of gathering we may safely have will be a major part of our September council meeting. Here are some of the questions that council is considering:

- Should we try for an outside gathering first?
- If we meet inside, what is appropriate spacing between people or family groups? What would be the capacity of the building?
- How can Holy Communion be safely and reverently distributed?
- What will need to be cleaned, how, how often, and who will do it?
- What parts of the building will be accessible?
- How long will we meet for worship?
- What guidelines will we use week to week to determine if we will continue in-person gatherings?

Of course, we are committed to continuing to stream Sunday worship so that those who are in high risk groups for this coronavirus and those who are not comfortable gathering in groups may continue to participate in worship. Our choirs are already working on music for these services.

Whenever we gather again, we will find that our worship will likely be different from what we think of as normal. As of now, the CDC recommends not being together in a

group for more than thirty minutes, not singing, and a much lower building occupancy than we are used to, even on those Sundays when attendance is low.

Finally, while the St. Andrew council and staff are committed to worshiping in person soon, it is important to note that, during this pandemic, we have not ceased to be Christ's church. We have continued to reach out to our neighbors and the world in service in Jesus' name. We have continued to study together, meet together, pray together, and even enjoy coffee together - usually via Zoom. We are not the church only when we meet together. We are the church whenever we are Christ to our neighbor, whenever we proclaim and embody the good news of God's love for the whole world, and whenever we attend to the ministry of reconciliation which has been entrusted to us.

In Christ's peace,

+ *Julian*

Julian Gordy, Interim Pastor