



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Dear Members of St. Paul's,

As we continue to watch the evolution of Covid-19 and its variants, we want to keep you informed about what we are doing at St. Paul's and why. This letter will lay out some of those plans, but first please keep in mind: this virus is dynamic and guidance seems to be constantly changing. We are adjusting our protocols accordingly, so please keep an eye on your email and/or signs at the church, which will keep you up to date on our most recent guidelines.

Masks: At this writing, the CDC has just changed their guidelines to say that even vaccinated people should be masked indoors in areas of substantial risk for transmission (as Monroe County currently is). We have learned that a vaccinated person carrying the virus can shed it as effectively as an unvaccinated person. Especially because we have a couple of baptisms coming up on August 22 and 29, we are **strongly encouraging everyone to wear masks during worship services, starting immediately.**

Worship schedule: We have decided to **return to our usual single Sunday service, at 9:30am, beginning Sept 5.** This service will be livestreamed and *will include communion*. People are still welcome to attend this service in person at this time, but please be aware that guidelines may change. We also always need lay ministers to read, usher, and assist with communion. Please sign up!

(One exception: **Sunday, September 19 will be our annual picnic in the park at 11am**, and will be held at the Riverbend Shelter in Genesee Valley Park, same as last year – this outdoor setting will allow our unvaccinated children to join us as well. There will be no 9:30 service on this day.)

Communion on the livestream: We have been hesitant to include holy communion in our livestreamed service for both theological and practical reasons. We are now moving forward with a plan to install the livestreaming equipment, eliminating the practical concerns, but I wanted to address the theological ones. Since its inception, holy communion has been something that is done in the physically gathered community. To that end, it is not the pastor's words that make it communion, but rather, the gathered *communion* of saints, the congregation. Of course, one thing 2020 illumined for us was the power of a community gathered online – and is such a communion/community any less authentic? I personally have found much fulfillment in my various online communities. With this in mind, some may feel inclined to participate in holy communion from home, with their own elements. Is this communion? Is Jesus as truly present in that meal as in the sanctuary? I don't know. If it makes you feel connected to the body of Christ, who am I to stop it? My theological preference would be for communion only to be received as a part of the physically gathered community, or in the context of a home visit (which I'm happy to make!). But you can make your own decisions about that. **One thing I would definitely advise against, however, is participating in the sacrament at home if you are watching the service after the live streaming.** In real time, online participants are an extension of the physically gathered assembly. After the fact, there is no longer a gathered assembly to be a part of. While you may still find great fulfillment in being fed by the Word in watching at a later time, I discourage this particular form of engagement.

Thank you for your continued faithfulness during this time. I look with hope and joy toward the day we can gather again without fear or masks!

In hope,
Pastor Johanna Rehbaum