



July 28, 2020

Grace Family,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This letter is notice of a change in our operations for in-person ministry. As of Sunday, Council made the decision to return to Stage One of our [Granting Grace to One Another](#) plan. This step backwards is, of course, not permanent, but a real-time response to the situation that has developed around us. Our decision is proof of the commitment we share to keeping people in this community reasonably safe.

The strength of having a plan for returning to in-person ministry in stages is that we have a variety of ways of being church together that can be implemented when the needs in our area demand it. While we had hoped for a purely linear progression through these stages, pandemics have rarely allowed for such simplicity in the past, and this one seems no different.

Fortunately, the numbers of new infections appears to be leveling off at the time of this announcement. It is true that many of the statistics are beginning to show signs of improvement - indeed, this would be a tremendous blessing. Unfortunately, it is also true that we have seen deaths accumulate and hospitals reach maximum capacity a few weeks *after* significant increases in the number of new cases. Returning to the Stage One at this time shows a commitment to our own members and our local healthcare systems, that we do not want to contribute to a potentially deadly burden at this critical time. Furthermore, this approach allows us to observe what so many public health and government agencies have long recommended as a necessary condition for easing restrictions: 14-day downward trends in new cases.

For a helpful analogy of this decision, consider a yield sign. Unlike a stop sign, with yield, one does not necessarily have to completely arrest forward momentum. However, when approaching a yield sign, one cannot simply pull out into heavy traffic. Our healthcare system is currently something like a congested roadway; we have the ability and the freedom to wait and *not* contribute to the problem. And in the meantime, we continue to offer online worship services, virtual coffee hours, and many opportunities to connect. We are not stopping our momentum with this decision - we're just letting the traffic go by.

While we are waiting for things to calm down a bit, this seems like the perfect time to do a little review of how our shared ministry has been going so far. Council wants to know what is working, what could use a little adjustment, and what we might want to avoid in the future. In order to do this, we need your help. We have created a survey that will cover Grace's response to the pandemic. We need each member (or, as many as possible) to fill out this survey: [Click here for a link to the survey](#)

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As we look ahead, Council will be meeting again (via Zoom) for its regularly scheduled meeting on the third Sunday of August, and we will continue to discern together what is the most faithful response at that time. By that time, Council will have been able to consider not only the local public health situation, but also trends in the responses to the survey. Your input will be seriously considered, so please don't pass up this opportunity to share your feedback with us!

In recent weeks, I have begun to feel a certain solidarity with the Israelites - the ones who were wandering in the wilderness. Like them, we also know something of the uncertainty and the feelings of helplessness that accompany a journey that does not seem to end. And yet, while we may lean into the invitation to lament as they did, we must be careful not to become wayward in our wandering. Like them, though our journey may lack certainty, it does not lack the presence of God. The Creator walks beside us through these difficult months, enduring them alongside you and me. We can be confident of these things: we are not forgotten, we are not alone, and our Lord will redeem this time of waiting.

If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to Pastor Rachel or me.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Gregg Hoffman
Senior Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church