



June 16, 2020

Grace Family,

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

Today I have the privilege of sharing some good news with you. Grace's leadership has decided to announce our first weekend of in-person worship opportunities! We will be offering two worship services during the last weekend of this month. The first worship service will be Saturday evening (6/27) at 7pm. The second worship service will be Sunday morning (6/28) at 9am. The remainder of this letter will share what you need to know regarding these opportunities.

First, I want to clarify a couple of things about this action of Council. The decision to offer in-person worship services was made for the purpose of augmenting our current approach, allowing more people to engage in worship in a manner that resonates with them at this time. So, these in-person worship services are *in addition* to the digital content we have been providing since mid-March. For those of you who are not going to be joining us in-person, you will still have the ability to worship from your homes, receiving the same content as those who join together in the Fellowship Hall. In fact, for those who worship from home, your experience may be a bit more streamlined, since you can still sing hymns within that worship format. For those who will be worshipping in-person, we will make the hymns available for your use, separately, so that you can sing the hymns on your own before or after attending the worship service.

Additionally, you should all know that this action does not represent a reversal of our understanding of the dangers of COVID-19. The pandemic continues, and based on information from local health officials, we expect the number of cases in our area to ebb and flow for several more months. We believe we can add this in-person option because we have taken precautions that make worship in this manner 'reasonably safe'. It is impossible to claim we can offer a worship experience that is 'totally safe' - this was true before the pandemic and will remain true afterwards - but we have adopted several recommended practices in this time for our in-person worship service that will keep people 'reasonably safe' under present conditions. Without these recommended practices, we would be limited to the digital platform alone, because we are in the business of transmitting the Gospel, not viruses. Please understand that this is a subjective distinction; what is 'reasonably safe' for one person will *not* be for another. We are offering both formats for worship so that each person can discern for themselves.

Now we turn to the process for attending in-person worship. You have already received the outline of [Granting Grace to One Another](#), our plan for returning to in-person ministry, and I would recommend you review Stage Two: Strict Social Distancing.

[continued on next page]

Assuming we do not experience a drastic increase of local cases, we will begin Stage Two on June 27. In this stage, worship services are limited to no more than 50 people - the maximum number we can fit in the Fellowship Hall and still maintain safe physical distance - and we will ensure this number by requiring that all worshippers sign-up for the services they plan to attend beforehand. We will need everyone who is planning to attend a worship service to sign-up each week. You can do so by using a link in this week's e-news, or by calling the church office to let Michelle take care of this for you. We are using this system so that we know exactly who is attending each worship service, which is vital in case someone who attends worship later tests positive for the virus and we need to begin contact tracing. If all of our available space fills up, we can add another worship service, beginning the following week. At this point, allow me to stress once again that worship will be available to **everyone** in the digital format, so even if the services are full and you cannot attend in-person, you will still have the ability to worship with us.

When you sign-up online (or speak with Michelle in the office), we need to know two things:

1. We need to know if you are going to be wearing your own mask, or if you need us to provide you with a mask. Masks are vital tools for our limiting the spread of this virus, so they will be required for everyone who attends in-person worship.
2. We need to know whether you are bringing your own folding chair, or if you will be using one of the metal folding chairs available at the church. Bringing your own chair is one helpful way of minimizing the amount of contact surfaces our sanitizing team will need to clean after worship. Plus, most people do not prefer the hard metal folding chairs, even for these brief services.

There will be more information in the coming days, but I hope this letter has served as a helpful primer for some of what the process looks like as we move forward into Stage Two. I am deeply grateful to the many people who have already offered their time, talents, and insight as we have been working to finalize this plan - **thank you**. Our collective willingness to adapt to the needs of this moment in Grace's history reveal the Holy Spirit at work in our midst, and I am greatly encouraged at the opportunity to walk through the unique challenges of this time with you.

Finally, let us return briefly to a passage we heard a few weeks back as the Easter season came to a close.

²⁰ [Jesus prayed,] *"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,*

²¹ *that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* (John 17:20-21)

We are living in a difficult time, Grace Family. But difficult times have long been opportunities for Christians to share the Gospel with the world. Remembering Jesus' prayer to his Father, we do not lose sight of the importance of the coming weeks and months, when our commitment to being a people united in mission will have the ability to help others come to know their God.

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