

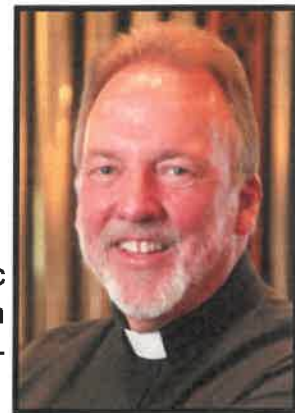
An Update from Pastor Jim

21 October 2020

Dear Fellow Members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church,

Greeting in Jesus' name.

I pray all is well with each of your families; that in the midst of this continuing pandemic you are finding ways to productively use your time, enjoying the extra time you have with immediate family and are managing to keep in touch with friends and family who are further away.



Since the beginning of the shut downs and closures in March, that were a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been carefully listening to the CDC, MDH, our Governor, as well as our Synodical leadership. In March their consistent, initial advice was to stop gathering in larger groups, which included church services, and shelter in place. At that time we had no idea how long we would be dealing with this pandemic or the extent of its remedy. Many had hoped that by fall we would be back to more "normal" functioning. That has proved to be not true, and we now suspect this could go on for quite some time. Even when a viable vaccine is found it will likely take significant time to get a majority of people in our country, not to mention the world, vaccinated. However, during this time it has become clearer what steps we can take to reduce our risk of contracting the corona virus.

Throughout these months, a group of individuals at St. Stephen has been working diligently to implement policies and procedures that we expect will maintain the greatest degree of safety that we can reasonably implement on site for all members of the congregation and allow us to carefully resume activities, beginning with small groups, and working our way up until we resume community in person worship. We believe the procedures we've implemented accomplish this. As a Church we are committed to maintaining a safe place to gather and as individual members we ask that you continue to follow the guidelines to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Since the beginning of this pandemic we have been able to maintain worship through our online pre-recorded services, which we plan on continuing. Slowly through the summer we've resumed a variety of activities including our Wednesday evening GAP worship service. Now, for those who are ready to resume Sunday morning in person worship, we are offering the opportunity to come together at 9:30 a.m., beginning this Sunday, October 25. We will meet in the Fellowship Hall, because it affords better distribution of seating and flow of traffic. We hope many of you will join us this Sunday, however, higher risk individuals; those over 65 and those who have underlying health conditions, should consider the risks involved. As I said: we have made every effort to provide a safe place to gather and safe conditions in which to worship, but every individual and family must decide for themselves when they are ready to resume coming to church in person. As with all activities on our campus self-health assessment, mask wearing, and physical distancing is required.

We are limited to a maximum of 75 people, so pre-registration is also required. Registration must be done weekly for each of the coming Sundays. To register, click on the following link: <https://st-stephen-lutheran-church.brushfire.com/worship-services/481702> (online registration is open Monday morning until 8am Sunday morning) or contact the church office at 651-777-1107 to register over the phone (Mon-Thurs 9am-3pm and Fri 9am-12noon). Enter the number of attendees, your name, phone number, and email.

Thank you for your patience, support and prayers during these uncertain months. May God, our gracious Father continue to watch over us, keep us safe and help us to be God's people in this place.

In Christ's Service,

Pastor Jim

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