



Zion Lutheran Church

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September 29, 2020

To Zion Lutheran Church Congregation:

On Thursday, September 17, the council for Zion Lutheran Church met and decided that we wanted to work toward having in-person, indoor worship. On September 23, a few of us gathered together to discuss how we are going to do it.

We ran into some problems. First of all, the recommendations from public health professionals and the recommendation of the Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments (a joint effort of the ELCA and the United Methodist churches) indicate that we shouldn't be considering this effort at this time.

The problem is that before we should consider doing this there should be a downward trend in the numbers of cases in the community. That's not happening – in fact the reported cases seem to be going up. That's certainly true in Wisconsin in general and in fact there has been an increase in Douglas county also. So rather than meeting the criteria for meetings indoors, we are moving in the opposite direction.

Furthermore, once there is a trend that moves in the direction of their being fewer reported cases of Covid-19 for two weeks, we are only supposed to have 10 people – and nobody over 65! I think it's important to be aware of these recommended limits so that we can go into whatever we decide with our eyes wide open.

There is a reality that clashes with our desire for safety, and that is our desire for community. For many of us livestreaming worship, zoom meeting, and phone calls don't meet that need. As an extrovert I find it difficult not to be around people, so I understand how difficult this is for many of you.

So we have a decision to make. Do we meet even though all scientific and medical advice says we shouldn't? When we try to balance our social and spiritual needs against our physical needs, we need to continue to weigh our options and our risks.

If we do decide to open the doors of the church for in-person worship, we will need to do it very carefully and under very strict guidelines. Masks would need to be worn at all times, except when receiving communion. There would be NO singing – not liturgy, not hymns, nothing. Singing, or even raising one's voice forces more aerosolized saliva to be expelled into the air, so we will use only spoken liturgy, and whatever music we have will be played.

If we do decide to open the doors of the church for in-person worship, we will meet in the fellowship hall. Air exchange is a necessary part of keeping as safe as possible, and there is

“Gathering together, growing in faith, and going into the world in Jesus name!”

virtually no air exchange in the sanctuary. We can open the windows in the fellowship hall, which means we will need to dress very warm in the near future.

We also need to take into consideration that there could be a pretty high price to pay for doing this. What if one of the members of Zion misses being in worship so much that they decide to risk being with us, and as the result of being together ends up succumbing to this disease? How guilty would each of us feel about that?

These are all things we need to consider when we think about meeting in person indoors. I have very mixed thoughts about this, and I am grateful for the person who pushed me to think about it more deeply. I have to confess that a very large part of me wants to meet in person. I MISS YOU ALL!!! But it's also true that there could be an enormous price to pay for giving in to that desire.

I don't think it would be a wise thing for a small group to make this decision. So I will put it to you. Do you want to resume in-person worship? Under what considerations are you willing to do this? What steps need to be taken in order for this to happen?

Please let us know. You can e-mail me at pastor@zionsuperior.org or call and leave a message at the church number.

God bless us, every one!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victor St. George", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Pastor Victor St. George