

First the good news: Hancock County has, so far, been blessed with a limited number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. But, like many of you, I was raised to believe that one should always “err on the side of caution” when it comes to matters of health. Jesus said to the devil, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” when Satan tempted him to throw himself off a tower so angels could catch him. We don’t want to test God by coming back too early, but God’s disciples are also not timid people of weak faith.

Many local churches (including Trinity Lutheran in Findlay) are returning to worship on June 14, and our Council feels that we could safely make that a target date...on two conditions:

- 1) We understand that this is a tentative date. If an outbreak occurs locally, we will delay starting services.
- 2) We take all precautions recommended by many agencies, including our Bishop, Governor, and local, regional, and national health departments.

The origin of the expression “err on the side of caution” was this: “err on the side of delicacy.” Out of Christian love, we are called to approach each other with gentleness and compassion.

“But God has put the body together...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

1 Corinthians 12:24b-27

Out of love, we all want to worship together again, but out of that same love, we don’t want anyone to experience great distress and fear out of worshipping together. The only way for us to accomplish this is to put aside for one hour a week our need to make political statements and need to be “right,” in favor of being delicate with our brothers and sisters in the faith. God designed us to be one body: if one part of the body suffers, all parts suffer.

In order to trust God, then, without testing God, the 1st Lutheran Church Council recommends:

- 1) Areas of the Church not necessary to worship (basement, 2nd floor, etc.) be off limits.
- 2) Summer Worship Times (8:30 and 10:00 a.m.) be utilized.
- 3) Only the East Entrance and the Elevator Entrance be open.
- 4) Entrance Procedures:
 - a. While outside, families (those who have isolated together) stand by placed cones.
 - b. Volunteers will direct families inside one at a time.
 1. Hands are to be sanitized before entering the church.
 2. Face Coverings are to be worn at least until one is seated in a pew.
 - * Note: feel free to BYOS and BYOM (Bring Your Own Sanitizer/Mask)!
 - c. For everyone’s safety, it is best to move forward to the front-most pew available.
 - d. Every 2nd pew is taped off; no one may sit closer than 6 feet to a non-family member.
- 5) All hymnals/Bibles/envelops/pencils have been removed from the pews.

- 6) Bulletins will be already paced on the pews:
used bulletins should be taken home or discarded into recycle bins.
- 7) Hymns/responsive singing will be sung by a cantor only.
The congregation may hum along and read the lyrics from the bulletin.
Note: Singing casts virus-laden aerosols even farther than 6 feet. A singer inhales more deeply and thus draws the virus more deeply into his/her lungs.
- 8) No collection will be taken: gifts/Footprints can be placed in a basket in the Narthex.
- 9) There will be no Communion, Passing of Peace, Pastor Greeting at the door.
- 10) Departing Procedures:
 - a. All trash and recyclables should be deposited in the Narthex.
 - b. No one should move into the aisles until the rows behind them are empty.
 - c. Social distancing should be maintained until the parking lot is reached.
 - d. Face coverings should be worn until the parking lot.
- 11) Cookie Sunday is suspended.

Whew! This is a lot of recommendations. Please be aware that we cannot force people to follow these procedures, and we really don't want to have to remove anyone from worship. What we are depending on is the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the people of First Lutheran. If these inconveniences would ruin worship for you or if, on the other hand, you are fearful to worship in these very unsettling times even with these precautions, please continue to watch services online (we will record one service each week) until the situation changes.

In the meantime, beginning today, I am going to "hoist" a new flag every Thursday to indicate that we are still on track to start worship on June 14.

Here is today's...Green for go!

**GREEN
FLAG**



Next Thursday, May 4, the flag will be white, meaning that we have one "lap" to go. On Thursday, May 11, I'll "wave" a checkered flag, meaning we're at the finish line!