

September 14, 2020



Friends and Family of St. Mark,

The Covid Response team met the last week in August to discuss some questions and concerns that have been expressed as of late.

We decided to format this letter in the way of question and answer in order to clear up any confusion.

We have also included a link to a blog post by *The Millennial Pastor*, which provides a pretty detailed picture of what church would look like if we were to open right now.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please reach out to us; office@stmarkcp.org.

We continue to remain grateful for all we have accomplished so far and remain hopeful for the future of the church!

1. Restaurants/Bars, Stores, and other churches are open, why are we not open?

As a church, we function in very different ways. There is more time spent together in one location. When we are together, the normal things we do in church- such as singing, are different than what happens in other organizations. We are following the CDC and synod guidelines encouraging us to be safe and not worry about trying to reopen and then have to close due to a positive case that could spread. Just because someone else is doing it doesn't mean it's the best option for St. Mark. We don't want to give a false positive just to make everyone happy and then have to go back on our word if the virus would spread.

2. Other churches in the area are opening, so why aren't we?

St. Mark is listening to recommendations from the CDC, Governor Walz, and the ELCA to make decisions about re-opening the building while taking into account our specific circumstances and community. Our building is not equipped to safely gather in due to multiple factors--a major one being our HVAC systems. While they are new and run well, they only recirculate air instead of pulling in fresh air from outside. The COVID Team is researching ways to effectively disinfect surfaces after the building is used to make it safer for staff and visitors.

In terms of worshipping at St. Mark, we are following the ELCA's request to remain using alternate forms of worship to best protect our communities. We have been actively connecting with members of the church making sure worship is accessible for all online and have had a great response. (This is not to say that everyone is happy with the idea of worshipping online, but that everyone has access to it. We

all would much prefer to be together in the sanctuary, but hope this opportunity to gather virtually for worship can fulfill us in new and unexpected ways.)

We also know that IF we were to gather together in the sanctuary for worship, things would be a lot different than what we are used to.

- We would have to either limit the number of people at the door or only allow people who signed up to gather.
- People would have to enter through the front door and stay in their designated spots throughout worship.
- We would not pass the peace or collect offering in a traditional sense.
- We could not sing or join in communal responses.
- Once the service finished people would be ushered out one group at a time, not allowing people to mingle for fellowship.
- We would have to space services far enough apart to allow for the air to filter in our system and do some disinfecting.

The COVID Team believes that worshipping together virtually far outweighs the idea of safely worshipping together in the sanctuary right now.

3. Why do the musicians get to meet inside and everyone else has to meet outside?

Worship is an essential function of the church, and we are a community that thrives on the gift of music in Worship. We would not be able to record music outside.

Other groups can gather and function in an outdoor space!

4. When will the church be open again?

In phases (check the preparedness plan) when it is safe to do so. When numbers of confirmed cases start decreasing for at least 2 weeks we will continue into next phase. [Here's the link to the preparedness plan](#)

**This might ebb and flow depending how the virus hits

5. Why can't we meet inside if there are 10 people or less?

Research shows how much safer it is to meet outside versus indoors. We are taking advantage of the days we can gather outdoors and do so in the safest way we can. As the weather gets colder, we will continue to have conversations about moving meetings inside.

6. Why are we still hosting Blood Drives and Circle Pines Voting?

These events are essential for our community. There is a nationwide shortage of blood, and this is an opportunity for us to help the greater community.

This is a big election year, and our building is set up to be a safe and an easy polling place when following CDC guidelines. Voting in Circle Pines typically takes place at the fire station, but due to COVID that space is inaccessible for the general population to gather at for voting. This, too, is to help the greater community.

We are taking all the precautions we can and keeping the building completely vacant for the next 72 hours following each event.

7. What are ways we CAN connect?

We all feel the weight of not being able to physically gather and connect. We encourage you to find safe and intentional ways to fulfill that need. Maybe you gather together on the patio of a neighbors house and all participate in worship together. Maybe you video chat with a small group and discuss what stood out to you in the sermon that week. Perhaps you write a prayer and mail it to someone in the directory whom you do not know well.

It should be noted, Virtual worship has allowed more accessibility for new members and visitors! Here are some other ideas for you:

- Outdoor Gatherings
- Zoom
- Online Worship
- Phone Calls
- Letters
- Service Projects
- Bible Studies
- Facetime
- Art projects
- Cooking together online

What church would look like if we met during this pandemic:

A blog post was written recently painting the picture of what worship would look like if we opened today. It gives an honest perspective of our current reality. We encourage all to read it in hopes it helps us better understand the reasons behind our decisions to remain safe.

[click here](#)

Peace,

Pastor Mollie and the Covid Response Team