



October 27, 2020

Friends and Family of St. Mark Lutheran Church,

The COVID Response Team has been hard at work in response to the pandemic and to help safely prepare for property and building reopening. All of our decisions thus far have been made based on recommendations and mandates from Governor Walz, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the St. Paul Area Synod of the ELCA. While this is just an update of where we are in our reopening plan, we encourage you to read through our all-inclusive packet that lays out our phases in more detail. If you need a copy, please contact the office or you can find a copy on our website.

For the last several months, we have been in phase one, where we have been meeting outside or virtually for everything. Pastor Mollie, Jenny, Donna, and the music leaders have met at church on a very limited basis. At our September COVID Response team meeting, COVID cases were decreasing. With that information, we had planned to have the council vote to move to phase two (small groups of 10 or less could meet in the church building). However, by the time council met in October, COVID numbers began to rise again, so much so that many metro high schools and middle schools (including all districts in Anoka County school) have been directed to switch to full time distance learning for 6th through 12th grade effective November 2. St. Mark's COVID policy states that the number of COVID cases needs to be trending down in order to advance to the next phase.

Members of Council and the COVID Response team believe it can get complicated and confusing when there is a lot of movement between phases. We are not robust with staff members. If Pastor Mollie and Jenny both contract COVID, they will not be able to do their work and keep the church running. We believe that we have the responsibility to keep our staff members as safe as possible.

We will continue to remain in phase one for now: *Worship online, meetings via zoom, and outdoor activities can remain onsite.* We will continue watching the numbers and follow protocols for our state, cities, and synod. The COVID response team will work with the council and maintain healthy communication to the congregation in the coming months. We plan to re-evaluate at the November and December council meetings.

We know that this is not the update you want to read. Please know it is not the update we wanted to give you. We stand together in our feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, and

grief. We encourage conversations, prayers, and safe distance gatherings to remain hopeful and connected in this pandemic.

Here are some of the events we get to look forward to:

- Drive Thru Communion: Wednesday, October 28 and November 18 from 4-7pm
- Professional Christmas lights on the outside trees—with this pandemic, we believe Christmas lights will illuminate our church and the greater community—as a reminder that St. Mark shares the joy and hope of the Christmas story and season. We are welcoming donations for those who wish to help with this cost.
- Advent/Christmas boxes delivered to each home for hands on experiences for the family.
- Christmas Carol Campfire- Friday December 11, 6:30pm
- Live Nativity- Sunday December 20th, from 4-6pm
- Christmas Eve Services will be available to watch together at 4pm and 10pm (Silent night candles will be provided in your Advent/Christmas box)

Peace be with you,

Pastor Mollie Dvorak
St. Mark Council Members
COVID Response Team Members