

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It appears that many places are preparing to return to some form of 'going about business.' Sadly, our community's Covid 19 case load continues to rise and the best defense is distance. My guess is that when it is deemed safe for us to return to worship we will still be asked to maintain distance. The good news for us is that the Risen Lord sanctuary allows room for us to meet with the appropriate distance maintained between households. Enclosed are our requirements for gathering based on the recommendations of the Texas Attorney General.

I hope that you've received some benefit during this 'quiet' time. I hope you are rested and at peace. I hope that the slow down has afforded you extra time to devote to prayer and study. The Lord is our refuge and our fortress.

For the Life in Grace group, I'm excited to announce that we now, after a rather lengthy period, have a box in the neighborhood mailbox unit. Our sweet postman happily presented me with keys! This means that we can check our mail often without the postman and I trying to make contact during the week. This is great! I will, however, miss his smiling face. The church's address is 1015 N. Tom Green Ave, 79761. Angie has labeled a box for us at Risen Lord and receiving mail there has worked very well too. Now you have options.

Additional news:

1. We are now on YouTube as well as Facebook. The YouTube channel is Life in Grace Lutheran Church. Weekly Bible Studies have begun and will be posted to both Facebook and YouTube on Wed evenings (hopefully by 6:00 p.m. -uploading is sometimes a strange beast with a mind of it's own).
2. The Lenten Offering boxes will be collected when we return for in-person corporate worship. So hang onto them and we will gather them when we can gather us. The money will go through Augustana District of LCMC to AIMJ (All India Masihi Jamat). This money is used to support 4 of the 90 or so pastors there who share the Gospel with Muslims at great success. The monthly salary for these faithful people is \$125. We sent payments quarterly so the next one will go in June and our collection will go toward that. The Lenten offering collect during our Mid-week worship services has already be sent for AIMJ.
3. The Lord's Supper — I know that you miss receiving the Lord's Supper, as do I. This sacrament is life giving and we need it desperately. At this point, however, the best thing we can do for each other is to stay away from one another. This is most certainly weird for all of us but it is our current situation. I know that some churches offer drive through communion or virtual communion that you take at home. Theologically I can't offer virtual communion. Some Lutheran pastors are participating in this but prayerfully I end up with more issues than peace. The same goes for drive through communion. We would be doing this if I could conjure up a method that I could consider to be a completely safe

practice. I cannot. Gloves and masks are helpful, but not a guarantee. When we can gather for worship, communion will be offered but will be served in a different manner than we are used to.

Jesus tells us to share in his supper. As Lutherans this is a sacred gift to us from Christ himself. It is not something we ever want to take for granted. It is a gift we receive, not something we "take," and not something we give to ourselves. It is done, preferably, in community. Scripture does not tell us how often we should receive this gift but at least annually (as the Passover is shared) is a good rule of thumb. We will share in the Lord's Supper when we can do so under the safest possible conditions. I cannot in good conscience endanger your health.

It is the *Word* of God that sustains us. 1 Peter 1:25, "...the word of the Lord remains forever." Let's gather, virtually or via TV or with your family, around his Word and be nourished by it. It will carry us.

4. The Food Pantry at Risen Lord could use some things like paper products and hygiene items. If you can pick up a little of these types of things when you are shopping you can drop it by either church if you have a key or make arrangements with Angie to leave it at Risen Lord. The church number is 362-2549 and Angie works Mon - Thurs.

It is challenging to stay connected during this disconnected time. But, we are connected by the blood of our Savior and Lord. We are connected by the Word of God. We are connected in love. Please continue to call church members and others. Touch base and check in. It is so wonderful that we can reach out in that way. Hopefully we'll be gathering in person again soon. God will continue to guide us and protect us. May he bring healing to this nation and to the hearts to of his people.

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen. Romans 16:25-27

God's peace fill your heart,

Pastor Becky

Hope, LGLC, LCRL Re-opening protocol

Our tentative plan is to begin Corporate Worship during May. The exact Sunday has not yet been determined. We will be in contact once the date is set.

We will reopen with Worship only. Sunday school will be added at a later date.

Small Group Bible Study during the week can begin meeting as participants feel it is safe to do so. The applicable following guidelines, however, must be kept—including masks, social distancing and sanitizing routines

Anyone who feels ill or is at high risk (guidelines says those who are age 65 and above), in addition to anyone who does not feel safe gathering is encouraged to stay home and watch the service online (Facebook live will be utilized during the 11:00 service and You Tube will be posted later on Sundays.)

Ushers will wear masks and gloves.

No child care services will be available.

Everyone is to sanitize their hands and put on a mask prior to entering the building. Maintain social distancing while entering and once inside the building.

Attendees are to sit with their household units and practice social distancing between each unit. Remember, 6 ft of distance is good, 10 ft is better. Keep two pews between your group and those in front of or behind you if possible.

At the end of service attendees will be dismissed by family unit, maintaining social distancing.

Offering plates will not be passed, but placed at the back of the sanctuary for use upon arrival or dismissal. (Please do not lick envelopes. Those collecting funds will wear gloves to handle money.)

The Lord's Supper will be offered. As you enter the sanctuary please pick up a pre-packaged filled cup with wafer (the wafer is sealed on top of the cup). During the service the elements will be blessed and "served."

Prior to and following each service seats and frequently touched surfaces are to be sanitized.

In addition to this, I think we will start without utilizing our assistant ministers. I won't wear a mask during the service and so to avoid playing keep-away-from-each-other around the altar we'll limit that space to just one for the time being.

We will continue to post services on Facebook and You tube. The You Tube channel is "Life in Grace Lutheran Church."

I will start offering Communion at church (Tuesday at Risen Lord, Wednesday at Life in Grace and Thurs at Hope) by appointment during the week for those who don't feel safe attending on Sunday morning. Contact me (phone, text, email) at least one day ahead for appointment times. (432-889-0461 or lifeingraceministries@yahoo.com).

"You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'"
Psalm 91:1-2

The 91st psalm reminds us of God's deliverance and protection. He delivers us, covers us, commands his angels concerning us, and he answers us in our trouble. God promises to always be with us.

We understand that we are God's. Under all circumstances, we are his, and he is ours. He doesn't leave us nor forsake us. And yet, we worry. We experience fear. We become distressed and anxious. Our humanity tends, sometimes, to override our trust in God. Our peace can dissipate and we are ravished with concern and apprehension. It's at odds: to be at peace in God knowing that he is always here for us, and to be overcome with worry or fear. The two extremes seem unlikely partners.

On the other hand, the two extremes—overwhelming fear and complete trust in God—actually fall hand in hand. I believe it is our fear that reminds us of our trust in God. Faith and doubt serve together. Faith overcomes doubt and is strengthened. In the same manner, fear and trust battle against each other and rise together. But trust is strengthened in fear.

When we are faced with a great unknown and fear sweeps in, we only have two choices. Cave in to the fear, or rely on God alone. Fear and doubt do not roll over and play dead when we decide to follow where God leads us confident of the Lord's presence and good plans. Our human emotion puts up a good fight, even when our soul is resting in God. The two extremes exist at the same time. Our spirit and our humanity can, and often do, clash. This is our plight, our struggle.

God specially designed each of us. We are human. We are children of God. We struggle, we lose, we conquer, we rest, work and play. And through all this God is a constant. He is constantly here, constantly loving and constantly taking care of us. This is life. This is life in God's complete care.

Sing praises to God for his goodness and his steadfast presence. Thank the Lord for his deliverance and plan. Bless him for his constant love and guidance. He is good and he is with you forever. Amen.

Pastor Becky Hand

April 22, 2020



Mission Moment

by Pastor Bryce Formwalt
Director of Mission Growth



What Business Are We In?

A colleague recently sent me a thought-provoking article entitled “Leading Beyond the Blizzard” by Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard. The article posed important questions for businesses and organizations to consider in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The authors suppose that this crisis that we are currently in will significantly reshape culture like nothing anyone alive today has seen before. They forecast that we are not in a blizzard (like many first thought) during which time we hunker down to wait out the passing storm, nor is it a bleak extended season of winter in which we long for spring to eventually arrive, but rather that COVID-19 is perhaps ushering in the beginning of an ice age that could endure for years to come.

Whether or not the result of this crisis is a long winter or the beginning of an ice age, the authors suggest that organizations, including the church, need to redefine our business as COVID-19 has shut us down: “If your nonprofit organization depends on gathering people in medium or large groups – and it is truly daunting to consider how many do, whether for fundraising banquets, afterschool programs, or in the case of churches for corporate worship – you are not in the same business today. And this is not just a blizzard that you can wait out.”

Reading this paragraph gave me pause as I found myself asking the question: “What business are we in?” Is the church in the business of gathering people into crowds on Sunday mornings? If so, then the authors are correct... and I would also suggest that we have been in the wrong business! Instead, every church should be in the business of making and multiplying disciples. Every church should be in the business of helping one another to love God and people. Sunday morning group gatherings are not (or at least should not be) the business that we are in, but simply one method of accomplishing our primary business.

Has your church gotten stuck in a rut of Sunday morning rituals and routines? Has the mission of the church come to a halt because of the pandemic? Do we not know what to do when we can't gather in person on Sundays? If so, these are indicators that it is long overdue to ask this question: What business are we in? The COVID-19 Pandemic gives us pause to rediscover our true mission and pursue new methods to best serve the fulfillment of this mission in our res-shaped society and culture. I believe that churches that can pivot effectively in mobilizing people to mission in our current landscape will be well-suited to advance God's kingdom in this season and the next... ice age or not!

Pastor Bryce Formwalt is the Director of Mission Growth for LCMC Texas District and Program Director of Harvest Workers, an online ministry training program (learn more at www.harvestworkers.net). Residing in Georgetown, Pastor Bryce is available to coach congregations on mission. Feel free to contact him with any questions or comments: 512-942-7776 or bryce@lcmctexas.org.

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