

September 3, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for your ongoing prayers, commitment, and support to the mission God has called us to fulfill together. Though the church building has been closed through much of this time, the church, we the people who are the church, have been open and working hard to encourage one another and others beyond to Connect, Grow, and Go as disciples of Jesus. None of us anticipated the year we have been experiencing. Even those among us who consider themselves master planners have found this year humbling and frustrating. We love Pastor Luke Korthuis' frequent response through these days which has been particularly encouraging and wise: "Joyful and flexible!" Though it may not necessarily be the first thing that comes to mind for most of us when challenged and frustrated, it is a particularly good and godly response for us to offer each other in these difficult days. Thank you to the many of you who have been modeling such an attitude for the rest of us.

As we head into the fall, most of us would like to put this pandemic business behind us, to say nothing of the many other challenges we face. However, virtually any schoolteacher, student, doctor, business owner, employee, athlete, musician, or, well, just about anyone can tell you, we are not through them yet, not nearly. Regarding church life, much as we would like to go back quickly and fully to in-person ministry, our Leadership Team has discerned that it is not safe or wise to do so. Instead, we will be following a model that is in use in many of our schools and elsewhere, offering a hybrid of gradually increasing in-person opportunities alongside livestreaming and other virtual ways for people to participate in our ministries from a distance.

In all of this, we invite you to keep the motto, "Joyful and flexible," in mind. We are going to try things and gradually add more things to what we do. However, we want to make sure that whatever we do, we do well and safely. We will not try to do everything we want to do all at once. We will progressively add things, learning and adjusting as we go. As the situation warrants, we will make further decisions and/or change previous ones, adding to, cutting back, or altering what we are doing as we seek to fulfill our mission while as a part of that mission, caring for the wellbeing of our congregation and neighbors. We will strive to be joyful, flexible, prayerful, and wise—and ask you to so strive with us in this, as well.

With this gradual, progressive movement forward in mind, our first priority for Sundays will be to ensure our worship services are ready for all to participate whether in-person or via livestreaming. Once we are certain this is taking place well and the flow of people through the building is managed safely, we will add other elements to our Sunday morning experience such as Adult Sunday School. Children and Family Ministry and Youth Ministry will begin this fall by ensuring their midweek programs are taking place well (CFM will start with virtual opportunities and Youth will have a hybrid of in-person and virtual). Sunday morning options for our children and students will be added in the coming year, as appropriate. Adult Ministry, Confirmation, Sports Ministry, and Outreach will also take place this fall, some meeting virtually and others in-person. More details and contact information for our ministries can be found on the enclosed bookmark, along with ongoing updates on our website and weekly emails.

We are excited about our plans for Worship Services. Beginning September 13, our Traditional Worship Service will take place at 9:00 a.m. and our Contemporary Worship Service at 11:00 a.m. For those who would like to join us in-person, people can register ahead of time to reserve a seat in either service.

There will be 100 seats available in the Sanctuary for the Traditional Service and 65 in the Gym for the Contemporary Service. Additionally, there will be tables available for both services in Fellowship Hall where the services will be displayed on the screen. At the same time, these services will be livestreamed so that anyone who would like to can join us virtually from wherever they may be. As before, the services will continue to be available online for later viewing.

As we move into the fall season, this is a particularly critical time to set up routines that will foster spiritual health in us and those we love. Surveys indicate that the change in schedules resulting from dealing with the pandemic, likely exacerbated by the comings and goings we experience every summer, has led to a loosening and lessening of commitment to regular times of worship, prayer, and Bible reading for many. Now is the time for us to rekindle our commitment to these spiritually enriching activities and to schedule that commitment into our weekly and daily routines. As you do, we encourage you to plan now to join us each week as we worship on Sunday mornings beginning September 13, whether in-person or virtually. Making it a part of your Sunday routine and encouraging others to do so will help you and all of us place worship, indeed, place God at the center of our lives.

Thank you, again, for your ongoing prayers, commitment, and support. As someone mentioned at our most recent Leadership Team meeting, we are in this for the long haul. Step by step, we will run this race that God has set before us, "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:1-3) Looking to Jesus and witnessing to his grace, we will certainly endure this time of challenge and even flourish over the long haul in the mission to which he has called us. After all, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at the right hand of God is at work within and among and through us. (Ephesians 2:15-22) Thanks be to God!

With you in prayer, partnership, and faith,

Mark Pattie, Senior Pastor
Karla Walker, Church Chair