



Grace Lutheran Church, Colfax

Our Mission: To be and make disciples of Christ, by sharing God's grace and serving God's kingdom.

5 June 2020

Dear Grace Members and Friends,

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 1 Thessalonians 3:11-12

It has been fourteen long weeks since our congregation has gathered in one place for worship. This exile has been challenging and yet new doors have opened during this time. We have learned how to worship and pray together online. We have answered the call to support others such as the LSS Faith Mission Homeless Shelter. We have been united in prayer and have celebrated milestones such as birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations. The world has changed in so many ways but what has not changed is that we are people of the Book, God's Book. It is a book that tells a story rooted in love and raised to new life as a church deployed into the world by the Spirit of God.

A team of members has met and established a plan for resuming in person worship. Our goals are two-fold. To gather as safely as possible, so as to protect the most at risk among us, and to offer flexibility and options in how we do this. These goals mean that things will need to be quite different for the foreseeable future. Until we have confidence in some sort of measures that can kill or weaken the virus that causes COVID-19, we need to follow the advice of the CDC in terms of physical distancing and facial coverings, traffic flow inside the building, and other practices we have outlined below.

The plan for our first gathering in the church building is worship on **June 21, 2020**, Father's Day, 10:15 am. The following precautions will be taken and we ask everyone to do your best to support these efforts. We realize this list may present some unhappy images for you, but we believe these are the best plans we can make in the midst of great uncertainty. We ask for your love, patience, and prayer as we learn to live with new realities, and until such time as we can relax a bit more.

Before the list actually begins, we ask that anyone, on the day of worship, who is or has been ill in the previous 14 days please stay home, take care, and recover. This has always been a common sense approach yet we have often ignored it – me included – as evidenced by our “elbow bumps” during the sharing of the peace. Now more than ever, your health and everyone else's depend upon this simple, preventative step.

Plan for Resuming Worship at Grace:

1. We will have limited seating available in the sanctuary and in the parish hall in order to comply with the standard practice of 6 feet between individuals or family units. Our revised capacity amounts to less than half our normal seating space. The basement will be closed off to minimize what we will need to keep clean.
2. We will broadcast the service from inside the sanctuary so that others who wish to come and remain in their cars can tune in via the radio and a short-range FM signal. Instructions for access will be provided each week.
3. Those choosing to come inside must wear some sort of facial covering. If you are unable to do this, we ask that you consider remaining in your car. Disposable face masks will be available on a limited basis for anyone who does not have one. Moreover, when we reach capacity, we will ask everyone else to remain in their cars and join us via radio.
4. We will have one door for entering the building and two doors for exiting. Everyone must enter by the front doors leading to the back of the sanctuary and be seated in the pews, closest to the front and filling up to capacity toward the rear. The only exception will be the use of the handicapped ramp which will be solely for those needing that access in and out of the building. We also ask that everyone use hand sanitizer upon entering and leaving the building. All will be asked to exit either through the parish hall and out the back door or through the door at the top of the basement steps.
5. Once seated, everyone must remain in place. As difficult as it may be to imagine, we cannot mill around to visit and Passing of the Peace of Christ will be limited to visual contact and waving to one another while in place. We also ask that trips to the restroom be kept to a bare minimum. Even conversations across the room are a source of concern; we know that the virus is likely spread through “aerosol” vapors. Talking and singing as well as coughing and sneezing are risky behaviors in an enclosed room.
6. If you absolutely must use the restroom, we ask that you follow the sanitizing procedures posted on the doors of each lavatory.
7. Offerings can be placed in the plate upon entering the sanctuary. If you forget to do this, you may leave them on the pew to be collected once everyone leaves. You may also mail them to the church, as well as to Charlotte Beyer, our Treasurer.
8. All hymnals, paper, and pencils have been removed from the pews to minimize surfaces that need to be cleaned. The service outline will be viewable on the TV Screen in the chancel. Bulletin inserts with announcements and the Celebrate with scripture and prayers will be available upon entering the sanctuary. We ask that you take them with you when you leave.

9. The “busy bags” we have made available for our kids to use in the past will not be provided. Parents are encouraged to bring some quiet toys and activities from home and take them with you at the end of the gathering.
10. A written record of who has been in the building will be maintained, in the unfortunate event that we need to notify the congregation of a potential exposure to the virus. This is in compliance with contact tracing requirements. We cannot reliably do this for those outside in the parking areas or on the lawn. We ask that you do your best to recall your own contacts so that, if needed, they can be reported by you. Outside contacts may proceed at your own risk.
11. The service will be simple and brief. There will be no hymns, other singing, or responsive readings. The pulpit, altar, and keyboard/organ areas will be shielded with plexiglass barriers so that the pastor and musicians can proceed without facial coverings for some parts of the service.
12. The congregation will be dismissed by pews, front to back. If we have communion, we will be sharing the bread only, which will be a wafer, individually wrapped, and dispensed with tongs to a table. Upon receiving the bread, each person will then exit the building.
13. One bright spot we can offer is that visiting with one another before entering and after exiting the building take place in the open air and are far less risky than being in a closed space for any extended period of time. As long as proper distancing and face covering measures are observed, you may catch up with one another outdoors to your hearts’ content. This is not a risk-free activity but is still far less risky than socializing inside. Again, we ask that you do your best to recall your own contacts so that, if needed, they can be reported by you. Outside contacts may proceed at your own risk. Bring a parasol with you for a little shade from the sun.
14. The recording of and posting to YouTube of weekly devotional material is most likely here to stay. Visiting our YouTube Channel on the Web is an additional option for those who are not ready to gather at Grace itself. You can find our Channel on YouTube by entering “Grace Lutheran Colfax” in the search field. Subscribing to the current channel will enable you to receive alerts whenever something new is posted there for viewing. These videos are always public, sharable, and accessible until YouTube ceases to exist. 😊
15. The occupied areas of the building will be cleaned and sanitized after each Sunday gathering.
16. Any requests to use the building for purposes other than weekly worship must be considered by the congregation council, taking into account all these same precautions.
17. Related to #16, our Vacation Bible School, originally scheduled for July, has been cancelled. A separate letter will be sent out to families regarding this decision.

Some final observations: This is a long list and we will be learning as we go, erring on the side of caution until we have more confidence regarding how we live with this virus and how to protect those most at risk. This list is also subject to change. Things will not be returning to “normal,” anytime soon. Indeed, a new normal is being forged for us all. We can use this moment to embrace new ways of being God’s people in the world and to celebrate those ways that have already stood the test of time. We are so grateful for you all and for your prayers, Spirit-given gifts, and support during this interim.

We look forward to coming together as we are able. Blessings upon you all.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Karen

Pastor Karen Martin Kepner