

Greetings First Lutheran Congregation,

There is no replacement for the shared camaraderie of worshipping our wonderful and glorious God together inside the church on Saturday nights or Sunday mornings. One month ago the church council made the decision, based on state and national data, to return to in-person services in an effort to allow congregation members to fulfill the need to worship and pray together.

Unfortunately, with great frustration and disappointment, the church council has watched the number of Covid-19 cases climb rapidly in the ensuing weeks. Unlike the first time when we decided to follow the suggestions of the various health experts due to Covid cases around the country, the current rapid increase in cases is occurring right here in southeastern Minnesota. After a specially scheduled council meeting this week to discuss how we should respond to this new data, the council has reached the agonizing decision to again suspend the in-person services at First Lutheran Church.

This decision is a sacrifice none of us wanted to make once, let alone twice in the same year. The fatigue of remaining vigilant and proactive in this ongoing pandemic is stressful and draining for everyone. The church council, much like you, would love a return to "normal". Regretfully that will not be occurring any time soon. We will continue to meet on an ongoing basis to examine the local data and the suggestions by regional health experts. While we may be pleasantly surprised by the direction the data heads in the next few weeks, a more realistic outlook would suggest a suspension of in-person services well into January.

Although this is not the direction we were hoping to be headed right now, there are several positives that have occurred during this trying time. Our dedicated spiritual leaders, Pastor Tim and Pastor Duane, have continued to find new and creative ways to reach out and guide the congregation. They did not miss a beat in continuing to lead services online, reaching out to bible study groups via Zoom, and offering weekly grace reflections through email. In addition, we were able to implement and carry out two in-person services that followed Covid protocols for public gatherings. And finally, we have all been given the opportunity to put our Christian ideals of grace and compassion for others into daily practice by putting the needs of others ahead of our own.

We are looking forward to reimplementing the in-person services that follow Covid protocol as soon as our state and local case numbers begin to trend in the right direction. In the meantime, the First Lutheran staff will continue to provide online worship which can be found on our website (firstlc.org). We will also be adding Friday drive by pickup of holy communion kits for people to use in conjunction with the upcoming weekend's online worship. The communion kits will be spread out on a table in the entry way to the church for pickup from 8:00am - 4:00 pm on Fridays.

Sincerely,

The First Lutheran Church Council