



ATONEMENT

LUTHERAN CHURCH

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“Sharing the love of Jesus by glorifying God and extending His kingdom”

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*“...But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint....”*

--- Isaiah 40:31

Dear Members and Friends of Atonement,

It's been four months since our last letter about the coronavirus outbreak and our congregation's response. We've all been making adjustments and sacrifices as we deal with this health crisis. At Atonement, **maintaining the health and safety of everyone in our church family and community continues to be our top priority.**

We're optimistic that better days lie ahead. Still, we want to be sure we continue doing all we reasonably can to prevent the spread of the virus, while ensuring the virus doesn't prevent us from our mission: “Sharing the love of Jesus by glorifying God and extending His kingdom.”

The church property is still closed to outside groups and church activities with two exceptions. The Camp Gladiator fitness group resumed their meetings outdoors twice a week at 4:30 a.m., and the Food Pantry reopened after radical changes to maximize safety and serve our clients outside. All office and worship staff, including Pastor Scott and Intern Esthel continue to work from home. Most of our ministries are continuing to function virtually using the telephone, email and/or Zoom.

We continue to host online fellowship and worship services each Sunday. A virtual Narthex Fellowship experience takes place on Zoom before each Sunday's live stream at 9:15 a.m., and the service is available via live stream at 10 a.m. on discoveralc.com. If you miss the live stream, the service is available to replay afterwards as well.

We are slowly beginning to host small, in-person worship and Christian Ed/Youth events outdoors, which all require masks and social distancing.

- Our **Outdoor Prayer Worship Service** is held every other Saturday at 9 a.m. Space is limited, so attendees must call ahead to sign up, and everyone must maintain safety guidelines throughout the service. Attendees have the option to sit in the shade on the lawn or stay in their car and listen to the service on the radio.
- Both an **Outdoor Youth Meeting** for middle and high schoolers and an **Outdoor ALC Kids Club** for families with elementary age children will take place this month.

Our COVID-19 response team continues to meet weekly to evaluate the latest news about the virus and the needs of our church, our ministries, our members and our community. Bishop Suarez has cautioned each church in our Synod to proceed with care as the infection rate remains high - even as Governor DeSantis declared Florida to be in Phase 3 of the state's reopening plan last week.

That said, we haven't yet restored **the higher-risk aspects** of our worship life – indoor worship, singing and Holy Communion – because each of these still warrant further consideration before incorporating them into our re-opening measures. These considerations include:

- Sanctuary capacity. We want to ensure all parishioners can properly social distance and that our 65 and older and otherwise high-risk worshippers are given a safe space to attend. Health officials and CDC guidelines continue to urge those in this high-risk category to avoid crowds and stay home as much as possible - even in Phase 3.

- Developing a consistent, reliable sanitation team to properly clean the church between services.
- Quality of worship. Singing with a mask is difficult, but singing without one dramatically increases the risk of infection by increasing the distance the virus can travel from person to person.
- Safety of resuming Holy Communion in person.

We do hope to hold our first Holy Communion service on Sunday, Nov. 29, for “Home for Thanksgiving” Sunday and the First Sunday of Advent. As we try to accommodate the most people with the least maintenance required, in-car services may be our best option for the near future.

We have always known that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38), but times like these show us the living proof. Attendance at our live-streamed services is in line with attendance we normally see this time of year. We’ve kept up with our expenses through our offerings, and we’ve reduced our general fund deficit. Most of all, our congregation’s spirit of encouragement and care has never wavered. People have pitched in and worked together, given prayer and support, and shared the love of Jesus in countless ways. We are blessed to know that love and blessed to know each one of you as a friend in Christ and a member of our Atonement church family.

We are grateful for the patience and gratitude that you all have shown as we continue to do our best to safely provide quality worship and ministry. We will continue to keep you updated as the response team makes recommendations to Council and our reopening strategy continues to evolve.

Peace and health,



Pastor Scott Lindner



Council President Laurie Chiamonte