



December 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of MLC,

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has posed significant challenges for all faith communities and their members, including McFarland Lutheran Church. The pandemic has not subsided as imagined. Currently, the situation appears to be worsening, and the coming months may pose new and greater challenges.

MLC's initial response to COVID-19 was based on recommendations of medical and public health professionals. It was unknown territory, but we had to cease in-person worship, Christian education, and meetings. We moved to virtual services online and ultimately added a drive-in service on Sundays. Our meetings have moved to Zoom! The adjustments we've made have worked well, but we all have questions about moving forward in 2021. When can we again be a community of faith that meets and greets one another and worships together in person? When can we resume the rituals that allow us to live out our faith?

The MLC Council, in response to questions about the direction the church is moving with the ongoing pandemic, created a COVID Task Force to help address our next steps. This Task Force is made up of council and congregation members, along with our pastors. Several of these members have medical a background. The members of this task force are Gary Toboyek, John Zweig, Jeff Gehrke, Sharon Mylrea, Dawn Bolstad, Kristin Hildebrandt, Christina Hughey, and Erika Landerud. The task force has met initially and has provided initial recommendations as we move forward to develop a plan to "re-open" the church for in-person worship and events. This effort will take time and a great deal of patience.

With the number of cases of COVID-19 increasing and the challenges within our healthcare system, the COVID Task Force and the Council agree that to begin in-person worship would be imprudent at this time. Emergency Order #10 (Public Health Madison and Dane County) allows for in-person worship, but we would jeopardize the health of our faith community if we decided to start in-person worship now. Outside of worship other meetings by religious groups are not allowed at this time. We do not see the Emergency Order being relaxed in the immediate or near future.

The COVID Task Force and the Council support Pastor Tim's and Pastor Kelli's approach to virtual services for the immediate future to include our celebration of Advent and Christmas.

The COVID Task Force's work is just beginning. Along with its initial recommendation, the group is organizing to develop a plan to return to in-person worship, Christian education, and meetings. While details are in the formative stages, the task force is looking at procedures from Public Health Madison and Dane County, the ELCA, the synod and other faith communities as to how to "re-open." With a vaccine and other public health steps forthcoming, we see our task force developing a plan that will identify safe practices for our congregation. COVID will remain an issue well into 2021. The plan we develop will look at essential guidelines that support people coming together in a safe manner.



The COVID Task Force will meet periodically and report to the Council monthly to allow for systematic communication to the congregation. The initial “re-opening” plan will be communicated as soon as possible in 2021. Modifications and adjustments to the plan will likely need to be made as the COVID situation changes.

Understanding the frustration the pandemic has created in our faith community, we ask for some additional patience as we move forward. We further need the prayers of the congregation to support our leadership and the work of the task force. Finally, as we move forward, feedback from the congregation is welcome to members of the Council. Below is the list of your council members. Some of the council members have offered their email addresses for you to have an avenue to voice your comments, questions, or suggestions.

May God continue to keep and hold us in the love of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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