



St. Paul's Lutheran Family, ELCA

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Dear Siblings in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, from God our Creator, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are now ten months into this global pandemic. Last March, I couldn't have imagined that the COVID pandemic would continue into Christmas and into the New Year—and becoming more intense, not less! It was one thing to imagine Lenten service and Easter Sunday in-person worship services being canceled. In no way could I ever imagine the cancelation of in-person worship into *December*, including the cancelation of in-person Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. Sadly, I find myself with the unfortunate task to announce that this is, indeed the case.

At the council meeting this past Tuesday, December 8th, St. Paul's council and I decided to **suspend in-person worship for the next few weeks, through the weekend of January 9 & 10, 2021**. The council will again meet on January 12 and will decide to either *extend* the suspension of in-person worship or to simply allow the suspension to expire. If the suspension *does* expire without further action from council, in-person worship would resume the weekend of January 16 & 17.

Please be aware that online worship—via St. Paul's YouTube channel—will continue. In fact, we are within a couple of weeks of being able to livestream worship, which would permit you to tune in *live* on YouTube for a worship service. Once the 'live' broadcast ends, the recording of the service will be automatically uploaded onto YouTube for later viewing. In the meantime, I will continue to pre-record worship and upload the worship videos onto YouTube. Online worship will be available on YouTube **indefinitely**. In addition, **there will be an online Christmas Eve service** on YouTube.

Now, to shift gears. It is true that we recently had two individuals attend in-person worship who later tested positive for COVID. However, *there have been NO reported cases of people contracting COVID from attending worship or other activities at St. Paul's Lutheran Family*. For this, we thank those who have graciously volunteered to serve as greeters and ushers, who have taken on extra duties to keep worshippers safe. We thank Andrea Rud for lining up volunteers to serve as greeters and ushers; we thank Holly McPhail for lining up volunteers to serve as readers, and St. Paul's office assistant, Brette O'Connell, for taking worship reservations for each worship service. We thank Jeanne Russell and St. Paul's Altar Guild for continuing their duties to maintain the worship space. We also extend a heart-felt thank-you Judy McPhail and Heidi Jones, who have been diligent in sanitizing the sanctuary, narthex, and restrooms after each weekend service since October

10th, when in-person worship resumed. Their hard work, as well as the hard work of so many volunteers, helped St. Paul's in-person worship experience be as safe as possible for all worshippers. Unfortunately, the number of new COVID cases have skyrocketed in Carson City. Worse still, hospitalizations from COVID have put tremendous strain on our regional hospitals. Due to these unfortunate realities, I feel that the best way we as Christians can do our part to combat the spread of the virus is to stay at home unless it is **absolutely necessary** to venture out.

I would like to commend those of you who have worshipped at St. Paul's in-person since October. You have been wonderful about wearing face coverings, avoiding physical touch, keeping physical distance, and cooperating with our greeters and ushers to direct you to your seats in the sanctuary. I deeply appreciate your cooperation! The suspension of in-person worship is not the result of anyone's failure to do their part.

I only wish I could assure you that life together at St. Paul's will be "back to normal soon". It is encouraging to hear news of vaccines being developed and that they will be available to the public soon. But it will take time for the vaccinations to be widely available. Until such time that an effective vaccine is available for the Carson City community, we continue in a prolonged 'Advent' season...a time of waiting, of crying out "How long, O Lord?", a time of anticipating what is to come, but what remains a long way's off.

While in-person worship is suspended, please know that the church office will remain open. **Office hours will remain as Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM.** Also know that the church building is **not** under 'lockdown'. The church building remains open. If your committee or ministry group **needs** to meet at the church, please know that **groups larger than ten (10) people are not encouraged at this time** and that **face coverings** and **physical distancing** are required.

In closing, please know that each of you are in my prayers. Thank YOU for YOUR prayers; for me, for Tom, for my parents, and for the ministry of St. Paul's Lutheran Family. We will need your prayers and your support as we continue our prolonged, Advent journey together, eagerly anticipating the arrival of 'Emmanuel'—'God with Us'.

A blessed Advent to you all, and an early Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! The peace of Christ—God 'in the flesh'—be with each of you this holiday season!

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