

## *President's Note for June 2020*

And June is upon us, beautiful as always, yet tinged with notes of apprehension, concern and grief. Many, if not most, of us have been sheltering in place as much as practical since March and we've been worshipping together by phone or online. As a community of faith and the body of Christ we remain connected, yet look forward to when we can safely gather together again physically in our church sanctuary. We miss the physical connection and we miss the sacrament of Holy Communion. Our church leaders are recommending caution and easing our way back to gathering again with new safety guidelines and protocols in place. You hear some talk of the new normal; many don't like that term and want to return to where we were. Whether we like it or not time marches on and normal is ever changing and evolving, think back to things you took for granted as being normal in your youth. I guess I won't pop in to Tower Records and pick up that new 45 or eight track release this week. Some things evolve slowly and other things quite quickly, particularly in times of crisis, natural disaster, or pandemic. There are some things that never change though, like our love for God, His creation and for fellow believers. In Matthew Chapter 22 verses 36-40 a lawyer asks Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." NRSV Our ELCA bishops hold that the second part of these greatest commandments to love your neighbor as yourself requires us to take precautions to look out for the health of our neighbor and fellow believer. Church leaders believe that by adhering to State and local health officials guidelines to minimize transmission of the Corona virus, initially with social distancing, good hygiene and sheltering in place we are doing God's work.. As I write this message new guidelines and protocols are being formulated so church members can physically gather once again in as safe a manner as is reasonably possible. Most, if not all of us, certainly want to gather again and eventually we will gather. Let's do it as safely as we reasonably can out of love for our fellow believers and our Lord. If you'd like to help with ensuring we are prepared to safely gather again physically please let us know. We will need help to be successful. We are a community of faith.

So, how will our return to physical worship look? We are currently reviewing and waiting on new guidelines and recommendations. Most currently presented guidelines for gathering call for small groups, six foot spacing except for immediate family members who live together, masks, hand washing and hand sanitizing, no communion or spaced single file with the host only, no singing and no coffee hour. These are guidelines I've reviewed from the CDC and our ELCA synod. By the time this newsletter gets to press and arrives in your hands it is very likely some recommendations will have changed. Some years ago I had a grand-uncle who died from complications from COPD and pneumonia. In more recent years I watched my mother pass in much the same way. While neither case was from COVID-19, it hadn't arrived then, the final stage is essentially the same, an inability to breathe in and absorb sufficient oxygen to survive even while on the maximum oxygen a hospital setting can provide. Absent comfort medications like morphine, those afflicted are left gasping for air and ultimately succumb. I have a friend whose sister is a physician. She volunteered to help in an overburdened hospital in New Jersey that was filled with COVID-19 patients and, from what I hear, nearly every patient admitted died. I relay these stories not to strike fear, but to remind us to move forward cautiously and prudently. We've been wise or blessed or both with our caution here in Northern California and haven't had too many cases. We do need to remember of those cases a high percentage could be traced to church gatherings. We have a predominantly older congregation and many have underlying, preexisting health conditions. We don't want to lose any of them. They are us. So, let's do our best to remain positive, move forward together, as we work towards worshipping again in our beloved sanctuary.

Finally, I'm writing this column on Memorial Day. I and we as a congregation salute and give thanks to all who payed the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy today. Yes, we've been called upon to temporarily refrain from exercising some of our freedoms in a manner to which we are accustomed and yet they remain and will continue to remain as long as we both remember to do our best to adhere to the two greatest commandments that our Lord taught us and also do our best to live out the motto on our national coinage, e pluribus unum, out of many one. Thanks be to God.

Live in Peace to love and serve the Lord!

Chuck Prewett

Council President

As an addendum or epilogue if you will I'm adding a snippet from a Psalm for our website edition of this column. I've just finished reading the historical fiction novel *Once We Were Brothers* by Ronald H. Balson, a good read about two men who grew up together in Poland as the third reich was coming into power. In the epilogue of the novel there is a quote from Psalm 97:11 that I find fitting and touching not only for the context of the novel, but for the world we live in today. When I'm discomfoted, out of sorts, disillusioned I often turn to the psalms:

*"Light is sown for the righteous, joy for the upright in heart." Psalm 97:11*

**Amen**