



The Bell

June, 2020

Monthly Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

Dear Friends of First Pres.

Quite a few are wondering: “When can we get back to doing things the way we used to do them—at home, work and at church? When can we get back to worshipping in the sanctuary?”

The Session has been wrestling specifically with the question of what worship in the church will look like when we are able to return to the sanctuary. The simple answer is that there will be a new normal, and it will be very different from what we have been used to.

Fortunately we have been able to offer Sunday services via Zoom. The work Rick Koepke, Kevin Litten and Pat McGuire have done with the Zoom program has allowed us to continue to worship together even while we are apart. Zoom has shown us that we can and will continue to offer this type of worship even when we return to the sanctuary. Every winter our “snow birds” retreat to warmer climes leaving the rest of us to brave the snow and ice. In the future, we will be able to offer worship to them via Zoom while the rest of us congregate here in our sanctuary.

We don’t know exactly when we will be able to resume worship in our sanctuary. That will depend on how widespread the COVID 19 virus has become I have been involved in conversations with the Chippewa Falls Ministerial Association, and if you had a chance to read the article in the newspaper on Sunday, (also here in the Bell) we are waiting to find out how the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the Governor’s “safer at home” policy, and the resulting rush to bars and restaurants, will work out.

If, in two weeks (end of May) there is a spike in reported cases and hospitalizations, we will be waiting for a while longer. If, on the other hand, there is no spike in cases, and hospitalizations go down in the state, we may be able to worship in the sanctuary again sooner.

We will have another ZOOM conversation during the last week of May. None of the pastors in Chippewa Falls is in a rush to get back into their sanctuaries. All of us are seriously considering the health and age of the people in our congregations, as well as the space that is available for social distancing. We do not want to put any of our parishioners at risk.

That said, Session has a pretty good idea of what that worship will look like when we get back into the sanctuary. The Presbytery of Northern Waters has sent out some guidelines that we found helpful. I will highlight a few of them.

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1. High risk individuals (diabetes, heart issues, COPD etc.) should continue to shelter in place.
2. We will continue to offer ZOOM worship. If you need help in navigating your way through Zoom, we will help.
3. Since we typically have fewer than 50 in worship, and our sanctuary is large enough that we should have no difficulty in practicing social distancing between family units. While we will ask you to abide by that rule, the ushers will remind you if necessary. All four sections of pews have been opened so even though you may not be able to sit in your usual place, there will be no reason we can't sit the required 6' apart.

In addition to bringing worship into your home, we can offer the same service in our library for those of you who for whatever reason want to be in church but don't feel comfortable being in the sanctuary.

4. For those who come to worship, everyone needs to wear face masks. Face masks reduce the amount of "aerosol" (droplets that come out when we breathe, talk, sing, sneeze or cough) in the air. The mask protects others from your aerosol, and COVID 19 is spread mainly through our aerosol.
5. There will be no fellowship before or after church. The collection plates will not be passed but will be placed at the doors to the sanctuary to receive your offerings. Unfortunately our expenses continue and we need your tithes and offerings more than ever.
6. While we will continue "Passing the Peace" we will ask you to remain in your place, and wave, nod, or bow, when you pass the peace to your neighbor. No touching, handshakes, hugs or elbow bumps. This will seem strange to many of you, but right now, we need to stay safe for the sake of the others.
7. We will not be singing for the foreseeable future. Singing produces much more aerosol than speaking—so we will forego singing. Hopefully, we will have special music via YouTube or other recorded means, and/or our musicians may offer special music from the piano-or will pre-record it.
8. Communion: We plan to serve communion on a regular basis as we have in the past, but it will be a bit different. We believe the safest way to serve communion is for you to come forward with two servers wearing masks and gloves handing out the elements. One usher will indicate when communicants can come forward to one station at the front of the church. Since our pews are about 3' apart, if we position ourselves at every other pew, we can observe social distancing without having to put Xs on the floor.

The servers will hand the communicant a piece of bread followed by a cup of juice. The empty cups can be placed in the basket provided for that purpose. This will limit the number of people actually handling the elements to one. Lynda Butek will continue to prepare the elements (wearing a mask and gloves, of course). The bread will remain covered

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on the communion table until it is served. The cups will be covered as well until they are served. I will not touch the elements. The servers will not touch the elements with their bare hands. Only the communicant will receive the elements in their bare hands.

If for any reason you don't feel comfortable taking communion, you can remain seated. Your safety is primary.

As you can see, the Session has been giving this issue a great deal of thought but we welcome your input as well. If you think of something we have forgotten or have another idea of how to proceed, let us know. You can share this with me or any member of Session.

We don't have all the answers. We don't even know all the questions. But we do know one thing – we will get through this together with God's help and guidance.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Ken

A NOTE FROM THE MISSION TEAM...

Submitted by Barb Shorrel

A big thank you to all who contributed to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. You donated \$370 to this offering. When we contribute to this offering, we make a difference beyond the boundaries of our community.

Our next special offering this year is the Pentecost Offering on May 31. Even though we will not be together in worship on that day, we encourage you to wear red, the color of Pentecost, on that Sunday.

When you contribute to the Pentecost Offering, your gifts are used in the following way.

- 40% of what we collect will remain in our community to support children and youth. We will again contribute our share to the Family Support Center for their work with children.
- 25% goes to Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) experience.
- 25% supports ministries with youth, ages 12-18, and those called to accompany them. This includes mission trips for youth.
- 10% supports the "Educate a Child, Transform the World" national initiative, which was affirmed at the 221st General Assembly (2014).

If you wish to contribute to the Pentecost offering, please make your checks payable to First Presbyterian Church with Pentecost Offering in the memo line. If you wish to read more about the Pentecost Offering, please visit <pcusa.org/Pentecost>. Remember to pray for all of us during this COVID-19 pandemic.

A Joint Statement in Response to COVID-19 from the Leaders of the Collective Churches of the Chippewa Falls Area

In late 2018, the people of Chippewa Falls and the surrounding area joined in sorrow as two separate events rocked the children of the area. In the midst of that confusion, anger, and pain, the leadership of several of the community's churches gathered together and invited the people of Chippewa Falls to join us in our mutual grief and gratitude to remember those whose lives had been rocked by the events and to celebrate the upcoming holiday season which brings so much joy and sorrow to many of us every year. Though the circumstances that drew us together were horrible, we found in each other kinship and a mutual desire for the comfort, safety, and joy of every member of our community, regardless of religious affiliation.

From the dreadful seed of those events, we have found the sweet fruit of an ecumenical kinship in Christ that has drawn us, and many other area faith leaders, together. Over the past year and a half, we have gathered every month to share in each other's sadness and cheer, to support one another emotionally and spiritually, and to raise up the good people of Chippewa Falls in unceasing prayer. We have united in shared ministries. We have exchanged resources. We have promoted each other's projects. We have worked with the school district toward an even better education for our children. We have worked with civic leadership to address major issues like homelessness, drug abuse, and child endangerment. We have, each and every one of us, extended our understanding of our parishes beyond the brick and steel walls of our respective buildings to encompass the whole of our great community.

It is with this sense of mutual mission and mutual accountability that we, the undersigned leaders of the collective churches of the greater Chippewa Falls area met virtually in response to the recent decision by the Wisconsin Supreme Court to overturn the "Safer-at-home" order. Like many in the community, we lamented leaving our beloved buildings two months ago. Like many, we have struggled to learn and employ virtual strategies for connection. Like many, we hoped that our exile would be short and successful in stemming the spread of COVID-19. Like many, we have feared for the health and safety of our parishioners and every member of our community. And like many, as we learned that the "Safer-at-home" order would no longer be in effect, we wondered what that would mean for ourselves, our families, and our churches.

Like everyone, we've mourned the loss of our regular physical gathering. We miss your hugs and handshakes. We miss the sound of voices lifted in sacred song. We miss shared times and looking directly into each other's (sic) eyes and hearts. But we also have rejoiced in so many things that have come from the last two months. We've all found ways to give voice to members of our churches who have found comfort and strength in connecting from their own homes. We've all found ways to reach out (virtually) to friends and neighbors to deaden the isolation and shrink the distancing. We've rejoiced to see hearts and signs and stuffed bears in windows as families throughout our area have shown solidarity with those in high risk positions. We've embraced this strange situation and believe we were being called into new expressions of our faith. Some of the expressions we've developed have borne fruit far beyond what we anticipated. Some of those expressions have proven so vital that we'll continue them even after we've resumed our normal activity. Just as the events of November 2018 taught us that we could be more working together than a collection of separate churches with separate visions, we believe this dark and difficult time can teach us much more about (continued on the following page)

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our shared experience and lead us into even greater shared joys.

As eager as we all are to join together in celebration and worship again, we are also imminently concerned with the health and safety of the people of Chippewa Falls. For some of our parishes, reopening is not an option as regional authorities in some denominations have prohibited church gatherings for the time being. For some of us, practical considerations of our buildings, or the particular health needs of our members, require increased caution. For some of us, the onslaught of conflicting advice and information make the issue even more difficult to parse. Many of us wonder whether local or county guidelines will eventually replace the “Safer-at-home” order making any reopening temporary. Many of us are concerned that a general reopening may pressure individual churches to return to regular services, potentially creating even more confusion and putting our parishioners and our community at greater risk.

Bearing all of that in mind, we, the undersigned leaders of the collective churches of the greater Chippewa Falls area have agreed to walk together in regards to resuming regular church activities. We have agreed that we will remain in regular conversation with one another concerning our individual and shared response to COVID-19. We have agreed that we will take guidance from various institutions such as the Wisconsin Council of Churches; the Center for Disease Control and Prevention; the World Health Organization; local, Regional, and State Health authorities; and our respective denominational leadership. We have agreed to continue to seek new ways to work together and serve our members and the greater Chippewa Falls area. We have agreed to inform one another of any plans to resume church activities and to bolster one another in our efforts to support our parishioners and the community. We have agreed that, for the time being, our buildings will remain closed, but our hearts and minds will remain open to the needs of our parishioners and our community.

We are united in our love of God. We are united in our love for Chippewa Falls. We are united in our admiration of those who put their own safety at risk to serve and protect our community. We are united in our prayers for a brighter future for Chippewa Falls. We are united in our support for everyone affected by COVID-19. We are united in our support of the children of the world in this dark time. We are united in our sadness over being separated from our people. We are united in doing everything we can, individually and corporately, to prevent this difficult situation from becoming truly catastrophic. To that end, we are united in keeping our buildings, for the time being, closed.

And we pray that God would bless you; that He would make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; that He would lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

Signed by the Pastors of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Zion Methodist Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, Central Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Harvestime Church, Valley Vineyard Church, English Lutheran Church of Bateman, Christ Episcopal Church

SERVICE TIME CHANGES IN JUNE

Remember – worship services begin at 9:30 starting in June.