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Rector

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Dear friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to all of you and your loved ones in the name of God. As I write this letter, it has been 10 weeks since we have worshipped together inside the sanctuary of St. Matthew & St. Timothy's. I have missed you all. You all have been ever present in my prayers and thoughts. This has been an extraordinarily difficult time for many and my heart aches for each one of you.

We have still offered worship every week and we have found various other opportunities to virtually gather and talk to one another; yet, I am keenly aware that not everyone has been able to participate in these, and for that I am deeply sorry. I am deeply grateful for each of you caring for one another, keeping in touch and holding others in prayer.

All that we have gone through, I could have never imagined, and week by week I wonder when will we be able to be back in worship together, and honestly, every time I ponder this it is not absolutely clear to me when this will be. And certainly, when we do offer worship again in the sanctuary it will not be the same as prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are several urgent desires that draw us toward wanting to be back together. These include being able to remember and celebrate the lives of those who have died and inter their ashes in the columbarium, break our fast of communion, and in the most basic form, be together in worship and prayer. All these things need to be balanced with the need to keep everyone safe and care for one another.

We have chosen to feast on the word of God rather than share in the Holy Eucharist. This, in part, is so that none have the privilege to partake when others do not.

Historically, there have been many occasions when people have not been able to partake of communion. The Armed Services Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church offer this prayer:

In union, O Lord, with your faithful people at every altar of your Church, where the Holy Eucharist is now being celebrated, I desire to offer to you praise and thanksgiving. I remember your death, Lord Christ; I proclaim your resurrection; I await your coming in glory. Since I cannot receive you today in the Sacrament of your Body and Blood, I beseech you to come spiritually into my heart. Cleanse and strengthen me with your grace, Lord Jesus, and let me never be separated from you. May I live in you, and you in me, in this life and in the life to come. Amen.

The uncertainty that we feel is not helped by the fact that we have various authorities to pay attention to. These are our bishops, as well as local, state, and federal officials. This past weekend alone, Governor Cuomo allowed for religious gatherings of 10 persons or less and President Trump declared houses of worship “essential.” Furthermore, the CDC issued some guidelines for faith communities (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>). What does this mean for us given that our own public worship is currently suspended until at least July 1st, as a directive from our bishops? And, how do we do this, in particular for internments, when social distancing is not possible near the columbarium?

Complicating things further, government officials have indicated that various sectors will open in phases in the various regions of New York State – Phase I for NYC is not expected until June. Therefore, what does this mean for everything else that happens in our facilities? AA meetings, private rentals, the Soup Kitchen and Angels programs, our long-term tenants on the second floor and basement.

I am working along with the staff and leadership of the church to develop plans that will help us most effectively use our facilities while safeguarding the health of all who use our facilities and sanctuary.

We will open our facility and sanctuary when:

- The bishop allows. (here is the most recent letter from the bishop -- <https://files.constantcontact.com/6d6c3589001/e26b63e2-87cc-482b-a5aa-55e16df2d800.pdf>)
- The vestry agrees it is time to open
- It is legal to do so.
- It is safe to do so. We have cleaning protocols, disposable face masks and hand sanitizer reliably available for worship.
- Opening the facility and opening for worship do not have to happen at the same time.

In the meantime:

- We continue to offer worship through Facebook and YouTube every Sunday at 10 a.m.
- We offer a (virtual) Zoom coffee hour on Sundays at 11:15 a.m.
- We continue with the Monday SMST Squad at 5:30 via Zoom. Different topics every week. June 1: Restarting the Soup Kitchen; June 8: Final Preparations for God’s Pride worship; June 15: A music workshop by Jae and others; and others to be announced.
- We offer live prayer on Thursdays at 10 a.m. on Facebook.
- There is a faith group meeting on Thursdays via Zoom – for more information email Santana.
- We will celebrate God’s Pride online this year with:
 - Bible Study: For the Bible Tells Me So: Conversations on Sexuality and Gender on June 3, 10, 17, and 24 at 6:15 p.m. on Zoom.
 - The God’s Pride worship service will be live on Saturday, June 13 at 6 p.m.
- Are you getting the weekly newsletter? If not, please let Mo. Carla know your email to sign you up. This has all the links to the Zoom gatherings and other social media. This email also has our most recent prayer list.
- Do you want to be part of a WhatsApp group? Let Mo. Carla know

Finances

As of now, we have been fortunate to receive most of our expected rents for the months of April and May. For some this has been a hardship, but they are doing so in good faith. We did not receive some of our investment income given the downturn in the markets. And, we did not receive some grants that had been already authorized. Our giving from parishioners in pledges and plate has understandably decreased given that we are not gathering on Sundays. Yet, we were extremely fortunate to receive the PPP SBA loan for the payroll of the church for two

months: this allowed us to bring all our hourly employees back. This means that the facility is being cared for, and we get wonderful music for worship, for example. Nevertheless, expenses for the church continue whether the facilities are in use or not: utilities, building insurance, contracts for mechanical systems, and other ongoing financial commitments.

I am grateful for persons that have sent in their pledges during this time. For those that are able, pledges can be mailed to the church; dropped off Monday – Thursday with Hilda from 10 to 4; sent by Zelle directly to the church's checking account (using croland@smstchurch.org as the associated email). We will also gladly receive your pledges when you are next able to worship at the church.

Following is an outline of all the things that we are considering and are already actively working on for when we do see each other again in church.

In-person worship:

- Masks will be required for all worshippers, clergy, and staff. We will aim to provide masks to those who do not have them.
- We will have hand sanitizer available and encourage folks to wash their hands often.
- For social distancing, seating will be distributed along the entire sanctuary with only related persons being able to seat together. My sense is that the maximum capacity for worship will be of 50 persons, and this uses all pews, including the balcony.
- Hugs and handshakes will not be allowed and will be strongly discouraged.
- Each person will pick up their own bulletin.
- All books will be removed from the pews.
- The offering will be collected in a single (stationary) location.
- We have not yet determined what will be our way of distributing of communion.
- We have not yet concluded what to do about congregational singing and the choir.
- The sermon will be offered from a fixed location and readers will read from various separate locations.
- Even while returning to the sanctuary, we will continue offering worship via Facebook and YouTube.
- We will need help with running all the technology needed for the recording and streaming of worship.
- We will have fans for greater air circulation in the sanctuary – and may initially not have A/C given that the Cooling Tower is currently shut off.
- We will keep an attendance for in-person worship in case any contact tracing becomes necessary.
- Initially we will not gather for a coffee hour after worship, and the kitchen will be off-limits.
- We ask folks who are at risk to stay home; we ask folks who do not feel well to also stay at home.
- After Sunday worship the sanctuary will be thoroughly cleaned and will be closed to visitors until the following Sunday.

Pastoral Care

We will continue providing pastoral care via phone or Zoom. We will adapt as conditions permit.

Facilities

- Hilda and her staff have continued working on the facility and preparing it to be open as soon as the law permits.
- We are also working on changing over from the cooling tower to more efficient and affordable A/C units for all the spaces in the east-building of the church.

- Once the facility is in use again, it will be cleaned every night, paying particular attention to frequently touched surfaces in common areas.

Sunday Meals Program

- We are actively working on reopening the Soup Kitchen and getting back to serving our neighbors. We are actively working on securing:
 - Reliable food sourcing
 - Reliable PPE sourcing
 - A robust volunteer base.

Other programs/tenants

- We will require all that enter our facilities to wear masks.
- We will provide clean spaces and bathrooms for the use of each group. Bathrooms will be properly stocked.
- We will ask each program/group to provide their own masks and hand sanitizer.
- Each long-term renter will ensure the appropriate social distancing in their spaces.
- The maximum size of any group will be determined by the safest configuration that allows for social distancing, and by the capacity allowed by law. The lowest number will be upheld.
- For administrative tenants, we will ask that they wear masks in common spaces and to receive the public in their offices. Each person will be responsible for keeping their desk and other personal items clean.
- For the tutoring center, the space will be cleaned every night; they are responsible for cleaning tutoring desks and computers between users, as well as other common surfaces.

This and many other things are being diligently worked on. Please let us know how you are. I look forward to hearing from you and to seeing you soon.

Blessings, *Mo. Carla*