

## **Reopening and Returning to Church: First Lutheran's Response to COVID-19**

Though in the beginning many of us had mental images of everyone returning at once to First in celebration, we now recognize that returning to church will have to happen in phases consistent with the four phases in the California Pandemic Roadmap released by Gov. Newsom and the CA Department of Public Health.

Way back in February we had church life. That model consisted of gathering together in our sanctuary for worship, enjoying times of fellowship and education, people shaking hands, sharing food, singing, passing the peace, sharing the Eucharist, and an occasional hug. Some have only known that model of church life, and we've been lamenting as we've witnessed the struggle to maintain it. Much has changed since then, and every day brings more transition.

Please understand: for at least the next year, we anticipate our lives to be shaped by the timeline set by COVID-19. If we don't continue to do our part in the communal efforts to contain the virus, a new wave of infections and deaths will cause further damage, and we will lose what we've gained from the measures we've already taken. If we push the envelope too far by reopening our buildings and resuming gatherings prematurely, we may unfairly force on our more vulnerable members the choice between keeping themselves and others safe and participating in congregational life like everyone else.

The purpose of this notice is to set the stage for what's next in two areas: Reopening the building for various communal gatherings and Return to Worship. To that end your Church Council has established a team to assist us as we Return to Church; they are Frank DeLouise, Rev. Dr. Richard Elliott, Jim Geison, Jennifer Mehlow, Melinda Person, and Pastor Kurt. Their main purpose is to identify areas of concern as

we implement a return and lead the discussion and process going forward. First Lutheran will take a conservative approach to our reopening, understanding that public health and collective safety is a high priority.

The team's work, as well as the Church Council's work, will be guided by the best available resources and recommendations of the State of California, San Diego County, and the San Diego City Health Officials, as well as the recommendations and blessings of our Bishop, Andy Taylor. They will report and make recommendations to the Council, who will then deliberate and make decisions.

The way forward will not be a matter of following a timetable, but of faithfully discerning the signs of the times and responding accordingly. It has always been that way for the church: "You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown...." (from Morning Prayer, ELW pg. 304)

As your Council, we seek your prayers for a spirit of discernment, for wisdom, and patience. We pray for researchers and medical professionals; for the planners; for the ill and recovering; for those grieving and struggling with the weightiness of these times. We pray for the watchers and wonderers, and all those who wait upon the Lord. May the Holy One, our Advent Hope, Good Teacher and Resurrection Truth, guide our decisions.

The FLC Reopening Task Force has created a survey to sound out the congregation's feelings about when they will be ready to begin meeting again. The survey is located [here](#). If you have any technical questions, contact Hannah ([administrator@firstlutheransd.org](mailto:administrator@firstlutheransd.org)).