

COVID & The Church

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is COVID decreasing or increasing in Wright County?

A: It's always hard to say precisely because of the variety of metrics, reporting lag, and daily fluctuations, but the 14-day average caseload per 10k residents as reported by the State of Minnesota has decreased for Wright County to levels seen in late July, but it is still four times the rate we saw in late June and well above the threshold suggested for Minnesota public schools to operate normally.

Q: We don't close the church for the flu- why are we closed now?

A: COVID-19 is not the same as the flu. It is both more highly contagious and more frequently fatal. Because COVID-19 can involve airborne transmission, has a long incubation period, is often present without outward symptoms, and poses unique risks of transmission. Even previously healthy individuals who have contracted COVID-19 have developed long-term health problems.

Q: Other churches are worshipping in the sanctuary and even allowing singing. Why aren't we?

A: Some churches have either larger gathering spaces that allow for physical distancing and/or more modern air handling systems that mitigate airborne virus transmission. We have neither. Over and over again, worship services, funerals, and weddings in church sanctuaries continue to be a significant source of COVID-19 outbreaks, in Minnesota and across the country. Our church has decided to sacrifice our preferences and even what we may feel is a need to worship in the sanctuary for the greater good, believing that this is the best witness we can send to the world around us.

Q: The church writes that we're protecting the vulnerable by not worshipping in person. Aren't those people likely to remain safe at home?

A: Actually, no. In-person worship puts the vulnerable at risk in at least two ways. If our limited number of outdoor services this summer is an indication, some of the most vulnerable because of either age or underlying health conditions will still choose to gather for worship. While that's their choice to make, the more significant factor is few of us live in a bubble. The long incubation period of the virus combined with symptomless carriers means that virus transmission that occurs at church has a good chance of being brought into our homes, our workplaces, and anywhere else we go during the week. The same thing, of course, can happen in reverse, bringing the virus into the sanctuary where it has heightened potential to spread.

Q: If it's safe for kids to be in school, why isn't it safe for us to be in church?

A: In many cases, it's not safe for kids to be in school. The decision to reopen some schools was made in light of the reality of the need for working parents to do just that. Worshipping online has no impact on the typical congregant's work life.

Q: Why not allow those who want come to church to come, and those who want to worship from home stay at home?

A: As noted above, we don't yet have the technology in place to worship well both in-person and online, although we have been working on a plan to get that in place. Some churches have decided to host worship indoors for a few, knowing that many others will be excluded from worship. We value including the most people over catering to a smaller number. Some churches with larger congregations and staffs have offered both parking lot services and indoor services, but we do not have the leadership in place to support additional service formats on top of what's currently being provided.

Q: What if people decide to leave the church?

A: Nobody wants to see anyone from our church family leave because they're not getting what they need from our church. It's important to remember that being a part of any church family is similar to being a part of a regular family- there are both perks and responsibilities. Church leaders and staff are doing their best to continue ministries as best they can under very challenging circumstances. This is a golden opportunity for each person to step forward and ask what they can do to strengthen the church for the common good of the church as well as the witness to the community.

Q: When will we worship in the sanctuary again?

A: That depends on our success in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and the completion of some needed technology upgrades in the sanctuary to allow live-streaming concurrent with live worship (not currently possible with the way our sound and video systems work). When we do return, it will begin with small steps, most likely beginning with "watch parties" and then adding live musicians and the pastor. Masks, distancing, and not singing in church are likely to be among the last restrictions to be relaxed.

Q: I'm sick and tired of living in fear. Can't we just accept the risks and get back to living?

A: Who among us hasn't thought or said that very thing? The answer is both "no" and "yes." It's "no" because none of us can directly control the virus, only our own actions to limit its spread. It's also "no" because none of us has the right, or the Christian mandate, to place our own preferences and needs above the well-being of others. However, it can be "yes" if we learn to accept that, like it or not, we are in the midst of a pandemic that requires us to adjust our ways of thinking and living in almost every way. It can be "yes" if we learn to embrace the challenge of finding new and creative ways to be the "light of the world" in this time when there is so much darkness in the world. It can be "yes" if we remember that the suffering and sacrifices we're all experiencing are temporary and really very superficial when compared to the suffering that Christians have endured over the millennia (and still do in many countries). And it can be "yes" if we remember that we continue to be a living part of God's salvation history, walking with Christ through all the ups and downs that life has to throw our way, confident that in all things we are "more than conquerors."

We can do this, church! Love God, love one another, and meet each day as it comes with thanksgiving, prayer, and an open heart to receive and redeem what the day has to offer.

By Christ's Grace,

Pastor Bill
10/1/20