

Immanuel

EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH
Sharing & Showing Christ's Love



A Member of the Wisconsin Synod
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Dear Members of Immanuel,

These are not easy times to live in. Our daily routines have changed dramatically. Our future on this earth suddenly looks uncertain. Now more than ever, it is vital to rely on God and his promises. Built on the rock of Christ, we will have sure footing to confidently face these end times and their troubles with our Lord by our side. We strongly encourage you to continue reading God's Word and worshipping in the way you feel comfortable and safe.

Paul urges us in Ephesians chapter 4, **"To live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."** Living with humility and gentleness, patience and love, peace and hope will not be easy if we do it on our own relying of our own thoughts and fears. But as I hope you realize, these qualities are the fruits of the Spirit! God promises to bless us with these qualities as we read and study his Word. So that we can go forward living this way, treating each other with the selfless love of Christ.

All of our members have different circumstances, experiences, and fears. We ask you all to show love and respect to all members for their choices concerning COVID-19, for you might not be as concerned to wear a mask or to social distance, but others might be terrified. Others might be more at risk. For the sake of consciences, we ask you to consider the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of your brothers and sisters in Christ as you speak and act. And to also consider your witness to the world in regards to these same things because fair or not, when the world sees you, they assume your words and actions are representative of God. Paul writes, **"Be careful that your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak."** (1 Corinthians 8:9) And James says, **"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."** (James 1:19)

As a church, Immanuel will continue to do everything we can to give you God's Word in a safe and God pleasing way. Our Church Council met on May 26 and June 2 to discuss and plan how we can physically return to worship in our sanctuary. It is not as simple as opening the doors again. The council created a COVID-19 committee, who's task was to study in detail the State of MN guidelines and make recommendations for everyone's safety and to ensure we can meet the State of MN requirements for faith based worship services. The council will continue to discuss and be flexible in our plans to best keep you, our members safe. If COVID-19 is found in a member present at worship or found spreading rapidly through our community, we will take the necessary steps to act to keep you safe and that might mean closing our doors again for a time. We will also continue to follow and respect the guidelines put forward by our government.

With that being said, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church will open their doors on June 7th to worship again at 9:00am. According to the church records the nave can hold 540 people. Following the state guidelines of 25 percent, we can worship with up to 130 people, but we need to take into account the social distancing rules. Again, I want to clearly say, if you are at risk or don't feel comfortable coming to church, do not feel obligated to come just because church is open again. Continue worshipping online or by the local cable television and continue reading God's Word. And if you are feeling physically sick with any of the COVID-19 symptoms, please stay home.

On the back of this paper are the very important instructions to follow as you come to worship June 7th and in for the foreseeable future. We ask that you read these, respect them, and ask questions if you have them.

Immanuel's June 7th, 2020 Return to Worship Plan and Guidelines

The council would like to remind us that we are not simply "going back to normal". The situation with the virus is still dangerous. With input from healthcare professionals, leaders of MN District of WELS, Immanuel leadership, as well as guidance provided by the MN Dept of Health and Sibley County Public Health, the following gathering protocols will be in place as we resume worship gatherings at Immanuel:

- The Church Council strongly encourages you to wear a mask but does not require it. Please bring your own mask.
- Please use the Hand sanitizer which is available upon entering and exiting. Kleenexes are available in every pew, please use them to cover your cough, sneezes, etc.
- We will limit singing in the service. Studies have shown that singing is an easy way to spread the virus. In the June 7th service, Pastor Bauer will solely do the singing, while wearing a mask as per requirements.
- We will have an abbreviated worship service. This will somewhat minimize the exposure we have.
- We ask that you carefully consider what you touch at church to prevent the potential spread as much as possible. We will be cleaning and sanitizing the hot spot areas at church each week and temporarily limiting traffic into church.
- The Church Council asks that you maintain 6 feet of social distancing as often as you can. To do this, we will be blocking out pews in the sanctuary. We ask that you sit 6 feet apart in the pews unless you are with your family. We encourage filling the front first. The balcony will be reserved for the organist and the camera operator.
- We will be removing all the hymnals (cards and all printed materials) and will be providing bulletins with the entire service. Bulletins will be placed in the pews. We ask that you take these bulletins with you as you leave.
- We will all enter through the main doors and ask that no one stands and visits in the narthex. We will also exit through the main doors. All other doors are locked at this point. The basement has been roped off and is NOT to be used. The bathroom in the quiet room off the narthex will be the designated restroom. Only immediate family members may go into the restroom together. Hands must be sanitized after using the restroom.
- At the end of the service, we will exit through the front doors. Please keep this in mind as you enter and keep hats and jackets with you. And remember to take your bulletin with you. An offering plate will be available on a stand as you exit. Members will be ushered out from the back of the church to the front to minimize distance between us.
- HVAC, air circulation, humidity levels are being monitored as per the State of MN requirements.
- Outdoor viewing of the service will be available as the weather permits. In order to connect to our existing audio/video equipment, the outdoor seating will be immediately behind church. Please bring your own lawn chair. The parking lot will be roped off and orange cones placed for social distancing of chairs.
- We are planning on having the Lord's Supper, but it will look a little different. Again, if you do not feel comfortable, do not feel obligated to take Communion. Pastor can give the Lord's Supper privately with you at church or you can wait until you feel comfortable. We will be testing out a new order of service. Date to be announced.
- IF YOU ARE SICK, or know you have recently been exposed to COVID, please worship privately at home. The worship service will be videotaped during the 9 am service. It will be available by Monday evening both on YouTube and via our church website. The TV cable viewing maybe one week behind. We are working out the details on this yet.
- Bible Study will remain online for the time being. All ministries meetings (Ladies Guild, Pioneers, Library Services, YPS, children activities and all fellowship activities) have been suspended with the exception of the Church Council and Elder meetings which will follow the COVID guidelines. Trustees will also follow COVID rules if they need to do repairs.

The Church Council thanks you for your patience during these times. We will continue to review the steps and precautions we are making to follow the guidelines set as best we can. We eagerly anticipate being able to worship with all of you again. We understand though that might take some time until we are all able to gather as we once did. However, let us rejoice in the risen and ascended Lord! The times may be uncertain, but our salvation through Christ crucified is 100% certain. Eternal salvation in Heaven is ours through the grace of God. Let us praise the One true God wherever we may find ourselves at all times for the wondrous things he has done!

May God bless you and keep you,

Pastor Steve Bauer