



May 22, 2020

Dear Holy Trinity,

It's been eight weeks since the Church Council made the difficult yet necessary decision to cease our in-person gatherings and move worship and other community activities online. Looking back, it was a faithful decision—one that centered the medically vulnerable, which, in the time of pandemic, is one way to live into the call to love God and love the neighbor.

The past eight weeks in congregational life have been surprisingly full. Holy Trinity staff moved out of the building. Building partners ceased in-person programming. We reversed the construction schedule for the Trinity Apartments renovation. We befriended Zoom video conferencing and used it for committee meetings, choir rehearsals, Confirmation classes, small group conversations, and adult learning. We hosted our first web-based congregational meeting and welcomed Pastor Doug Mork. We paid off the Opening Doors mortgage. Marge Torgerson died, and other beloved members navigated illnesses. We worshiped each week using a whole new set of tools, trusting in God's promises that remain steady.

Your lives, too, have shifted in a short amount of time. No one is left unaffected by COVID-19. To the parents struggling to balance responsibilities, to the retirees wondering how to spend their time, to the elders in nursing homes and assisted facilities fearful of their surroundings, to the students who weren't ready for the school year to end, to the graduates who dream about walking across the stage, to the workers whose lives have been upended, to the newly unemployed and underemployed—we say, "We see you." Your struggles do not go unnoticed. Not a day passes when we don't offer a prayer for you.

Pastors and Church Councils don't plan for this—at least, we didn't. Pandemic was not on our radar two months ago. We have been navigating this one day, one step at a time, leaning heavily on the knowledge of others, including the CDC, the Minnesota Department of Health, the Minneapolis Area Synod, the Holy Trinity COVID-19 Response Team, and other faith leaders in the metro area. Their collective wisdom has allowed us to make faithful decisions related to health and safety, budgeting and generosity, worship and care.

Because living in limbo is taxing, we, as a leadership team, have decided to publicly announce that, with the information currently available to us, we do not plan to host any in-person small or large group gatherings until *at least* September 13, 2020. We will reassess the situation and make a new recommendation at that time, using all of the aforementioned counsel. We grieve this reality, and yet believe that this is the call of the church in this time and place. The Spirit is speaking through science and medicine and communal wisdom, inviting us to change our practices for the sake of the world God so loves.

This operating plan allows us to make decisions related to worship, care, programming, learning, and communications that will best serve the community in the months to come. We will dive even more deeply into strengthening the online vitality of this community of faith. The congregational survey that all members will receive tomorrow will help us to make adjustments to our current practices and to dream of new possibilities for the summer and fall. We invite you (dare we say beg you?) to fill it out, so that all voices can be heard.

Eight weeks ago, we began our first online worship service, saying, "You are not alone." Those words remain true. We are grateful for the commitment you have shown to this community and to your neighbors. May the irony of this moment be that our physical distance means that we find ourselves being drawn even more closely to God and to one another.

With compassion,

Pastor Ingrid, Pastor Angela, Pastor Doug, Nicki Hines (President), and the Holy Trinity Church Council