

Our prayers are full these days, aren't they? Schools reopening. Schools closing. Working from home. Furloughs. Job loss. COVID. Hospitalizations. Isolation. Rebuilding. The election. Hunger. George Floyd. And then today: Jacob Blake. Whether we mumble or wail or sit in silence, I trust that God leans in to receive our questions, our fears, our weariness, and our righteous anger. God also holds our hopes and our dreams, particularly when we are tempted to leave them behind because of the heavy loads that we are carrying.

COVID has physically separated us these past months—forcing us to move worship and education online, and prompting us to return to that ancient tool known as the telephone to maintain relationships. We acknowledge that these are imperfect substitutes for those face-to-face interactions in the Sanctuary, the Sky Room, and even in the church stairwells. But in this time when we seek to honor our neighbors' health and wellbeing, we are called to be creative, flexible, adaptable, and forgiving as a faith community.

The pastors, staff, Church Council, COVID Preparedness Team, and I have been in conversation about the fall and winter seasons at Holy Trinity. We have been closely following CDC and Minnesota Department of Health guidelines. We've listened to the discussions surrounding schools. And we've been in close communication with other churches in the metro area. All of this amounts to hundreds of hours on the part of pastors, staff, and lay leaders. I have never been so grateful to be part of such a high functioning and faithful team.

Our learnings have prompted us to make the difficult yet unsurprising decision to hold Sunday morning and Advent Wednesday worship services online until at least January 3, 2021. Similarly, children, youth, and adult education programs and big committee meeting nights will also continue to meet online at least until the New Year.

Beginning in September, we will consider special services like funerals, weddings, and ordinations, and sacraments and rites, like baptisms and Confirmation, on a case-by-case basis. These gatherings will have no more than 25 people in attendance and will have strict guidelines to ensure the safety of pastors, staff, and worshipers. Because of the limited amount of people allowed to attend, Holy Trinity will contract with and assume the cost of a professional videographer, who will both record the service and livestream it for the sake of allowing the wider community's participation.

Also in September, we will begin to consider small group requests to use the building. Again, group size will be limited to 25 people and will have strict safety guidelines. Requests from Holy Trinity groups, ministry partners, and community groups will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the pastoral staff, who will consult with the Council's Executive Committee when necessary. We acknowledge that we are one of the few public buildings left in this corner of the city, which means that—even in the midst of a global pandemic—we seek to have our building act as a resource for the wider community.

As we prepare to pilot these gatherings, we also prepare to welcome our building partners back. Bright Prospects Cooperative Preschool will return on September 9. Metro Work Center, which serves adults with disabilities, hopes to return in October. Lutheran Volunteer Corps and Building Dignity and Respect Standards Council are already back in their offices. And I'm in close communication with the Minnesota Swahili Christian Congregation about their plans for the fall and winter. Led by our COVID Preparedness Team, we are finalizing our building preparedness plan, and are meeting with each of our building partners to review their individual plans, as well. Our goal is to isolate each community as much as possible, including building entrances and bathrooms. In order to facilitate this, the Church Council

recently authorized the Property Committee to explore options to make the front, 31st Street-facing doors more usable, as they currently cannot be unlocked from the outside, do not provide sight lines for receiving visitors, and pose limits in the case of an emergency. We'll report more as that exploration progresses.

The return of our building partners means that food distribution, in its current form, will come to a close this Friday, August 28. It's been an eye-opening, challenging, and encouraging experience of mutual aid. I will send a separate communication this week that will include images from this amazing ministry. For now, suffice it to say that we are in conversation with Du Nord, the country's first Black-owned distillery located right here in our neighborhood, about the possibility of their hosting a COVID-safe indoor distribution in one of their warehouses this fall and winter. Again, we'll share more information as we have it.

This past month, I've been helping to build a coalition of business, nonprofit, neighborhood, and cultural leaders. Our group, called Longfellow Rising, includes many of our trusted neighbors, including Kelly Drummer from MIGIZI, Ruhel Islam from Gandhi Mahal, Zoi and John Sandy from Glass Endeavors, and Chris Maida from Community Housing Development Corporation. It also includes new friends—liquor store owners, lawyers, landlords, artistic directors, distillers, book sellers, neighborhood designers, community organizers, and more.

One by one, we've emerged from the haze that followed the unrest. In an increasingly polarized world, it's important to note that our first step was toward each other. Many onlookers have focused on the destruction of property. And, while we certainly grieve over that which was lost in our corner of the city, we stand firmly on the side of the righteous anger that inspired the world. In many places business owner, nonprofit leader, and demonstrator stand at odds; in Downtown Longfellow, we are one in the same. We are committed to rebuilding together, because we believe that Longfellow's tomorrows can be more inclusive than our yesterdays, and we are committed to seeing this dream become a reality.

Step by step, day by day, week by week. For the planners among us, Holy Trinity, the uncertainty of tomorrow is difficult. Now, perhaps more than ever, we trust in the God who leans in close—understanding our sighs even before we've uttered them. Now, perhaps more than ever, we trust in the communion of saints—that motley collection of people connected across time and space that offers both solace and strength. Now, perhaps more than ever, we trust in the love that we share, one for another. May God, community, and love enfold you this day and in all the days to come.

Blessings and peace,
Pastor Ingrid

P. S. I miss you!