



A Reconciling in Christ Community 

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Saints of Zion,

The Church Council, Pastor Bode, and the COVID Transition team are working together to address the needs of the many in our congregation. We write to continue a conversation about worship and gathering in person as church, and while we cannot address every concern right now, it is a starting point. We know this statement is a bit lengthy, yet we wanted to be thorough in presenting our plans and getting feedback from you, our Zion community.

This is an anxious and frustrating, yet blessed and hopeful time. Our congregation has had a range of experiences this past year that include grief, loss, new beginnings, and change. We have been extremely lucky to have the Zion community to help support us and share in these ups and downs.

As we begin this conversation, we are reminded of Martin Luther's commentary on the 8th commandment in the small catechism – to listen to our neighbor with open minds in these discussions and work to understand their perspective and speak well of them. All of us who are working on these plans are focused on the physical, emotional and spiritual health of our entire community, especially the most vulnerable, and want the best for all.

As time moves forward there may be differing opinions on how to reunite physically as a community, and we welcome hearing your voices, ideas, thoughts, opinions and concerns through respectful dialogue. Please be patient and open minded, and feel free to contact council members or Pastor Bode to share or learn more. During seemingly constant change and adaptation, we do as the hymn says, and hold to “God's unchanging hand.”

In 2019 the congregation worked hard and collaboratively to put together what we called, “Planning the Promise.” It was a strategic plan, of sorts, that helped us focus our energy on core values and core ministries. Zion was very clear that we would, among a couple of other things, focus on being an open and inclusive community, work for advocacy and justice, and focus on music, food and children/youth ministries. We take these core values seriously as the Transition Team while we pray over and seek God's wisdom for the next steps in our call to speak and live the good news of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Plan

The Church Council with Pastor Bode has directed the formation of the COVID Transition Team. The team consists of individuals with a range of backgrounds and experiences, both in the church and the community. This team's purpose is:

- To seek feedback from the congregation, gather information, and present it
- To make recommendations to the Council and Pastor on how we move forward with in-person and online worship, and the logistics of how to do it
- To help explain the plan for moving towards in-person worship to the congregation and to help address questions or concerns

Current State of Worship

Zion has remained actively involved in worship and community engagement since the start of the pandemic. We are lucky that many creative and dedicated people have helped us adapt in the past year. Current activities include:

- Sunday Service with music, break out rooms for sharing of the peace, socializing before and after service, and regular children's breakout rooms
- Wednesday night Hope Service
- Friday Facebook Live check-in with Pastor
- Bible Study online twice a month
- Opening of the sanctuary for individual prayer and reflection twice a month
- The recent addition of communion outside during the twice a month opening of the sanctuary
- Plans for additional outdoor services (like Christmas Eve) as the weather permits
- Opportunities for our choir to participate in "pre-recorded" music for the Sunday services.
- Delivery of worship materials to shut-ins and those most vulnerable.
- Food pantry ministry

The Survey

Our COVID Transition team will be creating a survey, tentatively by the end of March, to send out to the congregation. The survey's intent is to measure:

- Feedback on how our current worship offerings are meeting the needs of the congregation
- Comfort levels with return to in person worship, as well as concerns and common questions
- Suggestions for worship going forward

This survey will provide needed feedback to answer questions and concerns, as well as allowing us to focus our efforts on what will best serve the congregation.

Keep an eye on your email for a link to a survey. For those who do not use a computer, we will deliver a paper copy to you! Please reach out to Pastor Bode if you have concerns.

The Possible Future of In-Person Worship

It is difficult to predict the future, especially since recommendations and knowledge surrounding COVID safety is ever changing. We expect that over the next weeks and months we will continue to adapt as we learn more. However, we want to make it clear that when we do return to in-person worship, it will look different than pre-COVID services. Things to consider include:

- Masks will be required while in the church building
- Health screening before entering the church
- No holy water
- No singing or choir (due to high risk of transmission)
- No use of hymnals
- No sharing of the peace
- Socially distanced pods
- Limited seating in the sanctuary to maintain social distancing
- Limit on the number of people who can attend service, meaning possible assigned days to go to in-person service,
- Increased air-flow via open windows/doors
- An altered or inability to safely share communion
- One way entry and exit.
- And we haven't even figured out the bathrooms!

The Resolve:

As you can see saints of Zion, there are so many more questions than answers and many things to consider. This is our introduction to say there is much more to come, and please be looking out for communication and opportunities to engage as church. Our Church Council, Pastor Bode, and the COVID transition team members are working to create policies and procedures to keep us all safe, even if we don't know exactly when we will be back in person. We hope we can continue to count all of our blessings and our days in this difficult and anxious time. Please continue to pray for one another and for our larger community as we contemplate the good news of Jesus Christ and the best ways we can share that good news with the whole world in times like these. May we all find Power and Peace at the end.

Sincerely,

Your Zion COVID Transition Team

Stephanie Melnick, Pastor Matthew Bode, Beverly Gay-Photiades, Ceil Smith, Randi Hamilton, Roger Smith, Kristy Stoll, Michael Cruse, Johnie Bailey, Ruth Steinert, Laura Rockwood, Jim Littrell, Stacey Jamison, Kelly Thacker, Judy Arthofer