



A Plan for Returning to Indoor Worship at Zion Lutheran Church

As my students in our Ecclesiastes Bible Study learned last year, the anxiety and solicitude and planning of humans are vain and empty. Ecclesiastes teaches that we should be content with the Word and Work of God, so that we are not presumptuous about anything except what the Word of God prescribes or God's Work requires. Or as the common parlance has it: no matter how carefully a project is planned, the best laid plans of mice and men will have something go wrong. Immediately following our publishing the first draft of this plan back in October, things changed and we had to postpone reopening the building indefinitely. Things are beginning to change again however, and so it is worth revisiting this plan now as we look at the new year. The purpose of publishing this plan again now is purely informational. We wish to address the many changes since the first plan was made. Unfortunately, we do not anticipate any immediate ability to return to in-person in-building worship at this time, as current vaccination levels are far below the threshold for safe gathering. In light of all relevant statistics, and because of the new, more highly transmissible COVID variant which is now circulating in the US, we are following the recommendation that churches abstain from gathering in physical space, indoors at this time. Our council has decided that the next decision point about this plan will be made in the Springtime. Our insurance recommends a 30 day notice of any plan to open our building for in-person indoor worship, so that our membership has ample time to review the guidelines and expectations. One of the reasons to publish this plan early is so that we will not have to wait once the decision to return to in-person in-building worship is made. So please take the time to read this plan in its entirety. We will be available to answer your questions in the interim. The first thing to note is that Zion Lutheran Church is not and has never been closed. Only our building has been under significantly reduced usage. The Church, however, has remained vibrant both in its service to the community and in its worship. We have remained open and creatively worshiping in alternative and safer ways than in-person indoor worship, and we will continue to offer these safer forms of worship even after we also offer in-person in-building worship again until such time as the worldwide pandemic has run its full course. Our committee heartily recommends these safer forms of worship to you first. We have Zoom worship on Sundays at 10:30am; and outdoor parking lot worships on Saturday evenings at 5pm with Holy Communion. The second thing to note is that we cannot return to in-person indoor worship without your help! In order to do this as safely as possible and to minimize risk, we will need your assistance both in following these guidelines and as enforcers to make sure others are following them as well. We will also need volunteers to help disinfect our worship spaces, run a power-point presentation, man the contact tracing check-in station, and many other various tasks as they may arise. In-person indoor worship at this time is still the most unsafe form of worship available to us. Current guidelines recommend outdoor or digital worship as the safest form of gathering. So do not feel like you need to return to our

church building right away. It is up to your discretion if you attend, but we recommend you refrain if you are in a higher-risk category such as: a suppressed immune system, Heart Condition, Diabetes, Obesity, COPD, or other medical conditions that would put you at additional risk. If you are age 69 and older, we also recommend you do not attend in-person worship. If you choose to attend even though you are in one of these high-risk categories, you do so at your own risk. Please consider worshiping with us in a different way. Ask a family member to help you get set up with Zoom, or if you do not have a computer available you can always join in to our Zoom meeting by phone. Contact our office for directions how to do this. You can also ask a family member for a ride to Saturday evening parking lot worship. When it is offered, by participating in in-person indoor worship, you are making the choice to worship with us in Zion Lutheran's building. We hope and pray that you will be respectful of others, and protect yourself and those who will worship with you. By joining us in in-person indoor worship you are accepting the risk to worship with us in person and will not hold Zion Lutheran Church or its Pastor, Staff or Officers responsible should you contract a virus and/or become sick. Thank you for being a responsible worshiper and for following all the guidelines below to make in-person indoor worship as safe as possible. For the safety and respect of others, please do not attend in-person indoor worship if you have had contact with anyone confirmed to have Covid-19 in the last two weeks, or if you have traveled out of the area in the last two weeks. Please also do not attend if you have had any of these symptoms this week: Temperature over 100.4 F, cough or sore throat, shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure in your chest, congestion, runny nose, significant mucus or phlegm, loss of smell or taste, loss of appetite, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache or chills, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, spots or lesions, or frostbite-like rash especially on the foot. If you are sick, stay home! The following conditions and restrictions apply to in-person indoor worship until Schoolcraft county reaches 98% or better vaccination rate and cases are less than 1/look region wide and there are no longer substantial COVID transmission risks: Masks are required for all people wishing to participate in indoor activities at Zion. We will have masks available if you need one. Masks must cover the nose and the mouth when worn. Wearing a mask only over your mouth or down by your chin is like wearing no mask at all. Masks must be worn for the duration of the worship service, except for the brief moment it may take to safely consume communion. When we open our building for indoor worship, Augustana hall will not be available for fellowship or any other use. We cannot safely or legally provide a fellowship nor coffee hour opportunity at this time. If our building is open for worship, it will only be open for worship alone. The doors will not open until ten minutes prior to the service time. And all worshipers are to leave directly following the close of service. The front doors will remain closed so that we can control traffic. Everyone must enter by the back (parking lot) door, where there will be a check-in station for contact tracing and to make sure that all attendants have access to a mask. If you have mobility issues and must use the elevator to enter our building, it is acceptable to knock on the front door and we will send a representative to check you in, make sure you have masks and ensure that the elevator has been disinfected since its last use. Worshipers will be assigned to socially-distanced seats in the order that they arrive,

starting with the front-most pew and ending with the backmost. Normal accustomed spots and pew preferences cannot be honored at this time. Worshipers may drop their offering in a basket provided at the door to the sanctuary, and pick up a plastic bag containing communion elements, before proceeding to their indicated seat. We will do everything we can to minimize people's movement within the sanctuary once they are seated. Worshipers will remain in their assigned seats for the duration of the service. At the close of the service, worshipers will exit the building in the reverse order in which they were seated, starting with the backmost pew and ending with the front-most. There will be no liturgical processions or recessions during this time. Families who live together will sit side by side, but there must be at least six feet between each group. Individuals from different households who do not already regularly have physical contact and/or proximity with each other cannot sit together. Pews have been marked off with string and tape to indicate proper distances. Legally, in the State of Michigan, a building of our size should not exceed thirty five persons in at this time. Most organizations and indoor in-person and events, are limited to 10 persons. With the exception of funerals which is now at 25 persons. However, for gatherings where there are exceptions in the law, a 25% of maximum capacity, is recommended. In accordance with these guidelines, our committee has determined that with the constraints of social distancing, our new reduced capacity is about 35 people. However, in practice we may have to have a smaller attendance cap depending on how family groups are distributed. It is stated in the order by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) that Religious organizations will not be subject to penalties for conducting worship at a capacity beyond these guidelines. But our committee has determined that in the absence of legal penalties, the penalty of becoming a hotspot for infection is much more severe. And so, out of Christian love and duty, we will do our best to follow these guidelines as if they applied with the strictest measure of the law. If for some reason we should exceed our operating capacity, we encourage you to join us in the digital or parking lot worship that will follow. We are working on a way to use the FM transmitter we currently have to broadcast in-person worship to the parking lot in the event of an overflow crowd. It is not our intention to have to turn away anyone from hearing and experiencing God's mercy! We will provide hand-sanitizer at the sanctuary doors. Please make sure to practice good hand-hygiene while attending worship. Although we all want to greet one another, there will be no hand shaking or hugging at this time. We recommend greeting one another with a holy bow to show reverence and God's peace. Due to the limitations of our cleaning capabilities, the bathrooms will not be available for use during indoor worship. Please go before you go! In the event of an absolute emergency, we can accommodate exactly one (1) person of each gender to use a bathroom. After each bathroom has been used once, it is no longer available until our cleaning staff can disinfect it on Monday. The heating in the sanctuary is a forced air system. This means that we cannot safely run the heater while people are occupying the building. It has been shown that forced air is an expedient way to spread virus particles throughout the room. Regardless of the filtration capabilities of the system, the problem is the air blowing directly upon gathered people which spreads moist air droplets about. We will run the heat prior to the service to heat the space to the best of

our ability, but the system will be shut off during our worship. Please wear a coat! There will be no bulletins nor worship books available for in-person worship. This is to minimize surface contact, and the passing around of materials from person to person which could be vehicles for infection. We will provide a power-point presentation for people to follow the liturgy during the service. There will be no singing nor speaking in unison. Studies show that public singing with or without masks is worse than coughing on someone without a mask. In fact, singing is like being exposed to one long sustained cough, and it quickly exceeds the threshold for maximum saturation of virus particles for infection. There is no safe way to include singing with in-person indoor worship at this time. Speaking in unison is also discouraged while indoors for the same reason. So we ask that during these indoor services you will refrain from speaking aloud the Lord's Prayer, the Confession of Faith, and other cherished Christian responses of faith that we can and will speak during our more remote forms of worship. Instead, as with any in-person music we may have, we ask that you hold the words in your heart. Communion will be celebrated using prepackaged kits (received on your way in the door) that contain a wafer and grape juice. We have already begun this practice with our parking lot worships, and we will proceed in the same manner for indoor worship. The celebrant for communion will first read aloud the prayers and words of institution, and then the community will take communion in unison with the words, "This is the body of Christ given for you," followed by the words, "This is the blood of Christ Shed for you." Please hold any Amen's or verbal responses in your heart. We also ask you to do your best to stagger your consumption of the elements to reduce as much as possible the time that people are unmasked together in the worship space. The service time for indoor in-person worship on Sundays will be 9:30am. This will accommodate Zoom Worship to continue at 10:30am. Saturday services will continue to be held in the parking lot until such time as the pandemic has run its course. If for whatever reason, parking lot worships become no longer feasible, Saturday worship will take place in Augustana Hall and the Sanctuary will be closed. There is not enough time between Saturday evening and Sunday morning to accommodate two indoor worships meeting in the same space. In this case, we will also work on a way to have the FM transmitter running for those who do not feel safe coming indoors. Saturday will always be attend-able in the parking lot. But for those who may be indoors, all the rest of the Sunday rules apply to the space set up in Augustana Hall. Since Saturday worship is traditionally smaller in numbers, there will not be another Saturday evening time of worship in addition to the normal 5pm. Our reopening the building for in-person indoor worship is contingent upon risk factors and the general safety of the community. If any of the following conditions arise, we will not open our building. If they occur after such time as we are open, we will close our building again.

1. If any Schoolcraft county schools close or go to online-only learning because of an outbreak.
2. If the risk-level for infection in Schoolcraft county rises above 65% for a gathering of 25 people or more as determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment tool at <https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/>
3. If the governing authorities of Michigan or other local authorities issue a state or

regional lock-down or significant indoor restrictions to contain the spread of the virus like the ones that are currently in effect, where we have gone to reduced in-person staff hours.

4. If any indoor activity at Zion Lutheran Church's building should become associated in any way with an outbreak despite our best practices in following of these guidelines.

5. If, for whatever reason, our council should determine it is no longer safe or feasible to move forward with in-person indoor worship, taking into account recommendations from local officials, and taking into consideration the safety of our congregation and its members. To safely implement this opening plan, we will look for the following conditions to be met.

1. If the number of new COVID-19 Cases in Schoolcraft county has declined steadily for at least 14 days.

2. If Schoolcraft County reaches a 60% vaccination rate or better, cases are less than 10/100k region-wide, and we have less than 10% positive tests per our population.

3. We will also look to make sure Schoolcraft County is able to safely care for all patients and rapid diagnostic testing capacity in our area is sufficient to test, at a minimum, all people with COVID-19 symptoms, including mild cases, as well as their close contacts and those in essential roles.

4. If there is new legislation or executive order or other such rule of law that releases all indoor gathering restrictions and indicates it is safe to gather indoors again. This does not include if current restrictions simply expire. When the power goes out of a traffic light governing at an intersection, common sense dictates we are to treat it as a stop sign. A vacuum of orders does not make a positive green light for everyone. This condition applies only to positively worded legislation that indicates safety and order for indoor gatherings.

5. If, for whatever reason, our council should determine that taking into account recommendations from local officials, and taking into consideration the safety of our congregation and its members, and considering all the risks, restrictions and costs beholden to us as laid out in this plan above, that it is worth it and necessary, all things considered, to move forward with in-person indoor worship.



The church office will be open Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00am-12:00pm until further notice. All other days, if you have questions, concerns or are in need of pastoral care, please contact Pastor Richter at 286-4383.

Holy Communion will be offered each week at the Saturday parking lot worship service. If you are interested in helping defray the cost of the individually packaged communion sets, please call the office. The cost is \$71.00.

To join the Zoom Worship go to our Website and click on Covid Info. There is a big blue button that says "Join our Zoom worship" click on it. Click **Open** on the dialog shown by your browser. If you don't see a dialog, click **Launch Meeting**. You can also join by phone by calling 929-205-6099 and entering the following ID # 9063415427, Passcode 49854.



This year Ash Wednesday worship will be in the parking lot at 6:00pm. You will remain in your vehicle and a small portion of ashes will given to you along with your communion "to go kit" . You will impose the ashes on yourself and your family.
Lenten mid-week worship will be on Zoom every Wednesday during Lent at 6:00pm.



Zion's Annual Meeting will be held Sunday, February 14th via Zoom at 11:00am. Annual reports may be picked up (one per family) February 8 & 10 from 9:00am-12:00pm or you can call the office to have one mailed to you.



Sunday, February 14th is **Scout Sunday**. Scouts from Troop 400, 401 and Cub Pack 402 have been a part of Zion for many years. Thank you to the leaders and boys and girls who continue to serve their community through Scouting during this difficult time.

The Quilters have been busy! They have available sewing kits for anyone who would like to put together squares to make quilt tops. If you are interested call the office Monday or Wednesday to pick one (or more) up. You can also leave a voice mail message and Shirley will return your call.

Join us for Bible Study

The Monday night Bible study group will be and 4th Mondays starting January 11th. Pr. study that has yet to be determined. We will meet in person in Augustana Hall. Be sure to wear your mask and social distance. If you have any questions about this opportunity for study, please contact the office.



meeting at 6:30, every 2nd Richter will be leading our

We will **not** be having the annual Supper due to Covid. We'll see you



**SHROVE
TUESDAY**

Shrove Tuesday Pancake next year!!



We will **not** be having our Mid Week Lenten Soup Suppers this year due to Covid. We'll be back next year!!



Condolences
to the Family of...

Merlin Decker. Merle and Gerry were members of Zion for many years when health issues forced them to move with their son and daughter-in-law to Texas. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Decker family.

Circle News

The Circles are able to start their monthly meetings. If you are not a member of a circle and would be interested in joining one, please contact any one of the following ladies for more information:

Sarah Circle—Liz Macklem

Joy Circle—

Ruth Circle—

Hope Circle—Sheila Clark

The **Sarah Circle** meets on Mondays at 1:00pm

The **Joy Circle** meets on the second Thursday at 10:00am.

The **Ruth Circle** meets on the third Wednesday at 11:30am.

The **Hope Circle** meets on the third Thursday at 6:00pm.

Be sure to check with your Circle Leader to find out if and where your circle will be meeting.

Upcoming Scripture Readings

February 7 —Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

Isaiah 40:21-31, Psalm 147:1-11, 20c, 1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Mark 1:29-39

February 14—Transfiguration of Our Lord

2 Kings 2:1-12, Psalm 50:1-6, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, Mark 9:2-9

February 21—First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:9-15

February 28—Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Psalm 22:23-31, Romans 4:13-25,

Mark 8:31-38

From the Northern Great Lakes Synod



“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” ~Romans 15:13

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod, There is a scene from the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, where the protagonist, Andy, is convicted of a crime he did not commit. He spends some 30 years in a dreadful prison until finally he escapes to begin a new life in a little oceanside village in

Mexico. He sends a letter to his inmate friend, Red, and invites him to join him after Red is paroled from his own lifetime sentence for a regrettable crime he committed in his youth. As we watch Red ride a bus towards Mexico, we hear his voice say, “I find I am so excited I can hardly keep a thought in my head. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.” Hope is a powerful force. It pulls us forward through the present as we reach for a different future. It was hope that made Andy’s and Red’s prison time more bearable. And it is hope for so much that pulls us forward from our present circumstances toward a future that promises: • an end to the pandemic. • gathering around tables with coffee-filled cups and bakery in hand. • laughter and conversation once again filling fellowship halls, restaurants, and

living rooms. • voices raised in songs of praise, in harmony, with great gusto. • ministry without masks.

I can hardly wait! I Corinthians 13:13 proclaims, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” The greatest of these IS love. But this year, in the year of our Lord 2021, our theme will focus on HOPE. Make no mistake, we need love and faith, too. But right now, we really need HOPE. As I write this, the inauguration looms large. Plans for armed and potentially violent demonstrations outside each state’s capitol building are being reported, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff has issued a public reminder to all military branches of their oath to defend the Constitution. It is more than a little unsettling that they felt such a reminder was necessary. By the time you read this, whatever happens next week and before the end of January will be in the past. We all will have watched the news, heard the reports, and prayed over what right now has not happened yet. And still, whatever is going to happen, does not change what we have always proclaimed to be true, that our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. What that means for our present circumstances has taken on more urgency. The more we feel the chaos and uncertainty of our present, the more we reach for that which is true and solid and constant. I hope we find a way towards healing, in our congregations and in our nation. I hope as people of faith we have a witness that is authentic to the gospel message of Jesus. I hope our congregations and pastoral leaders can hold on a little longer. I hope. I hope.

O God our help in ages past
Our hope for years to come
Our shelter from the stormy blast
And our eternal home.
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

Yours in Christ, Bishop Katherine Finegan

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Congregation Council:

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Cathy Knudson, Vice President

Kay MacGregor, Secretary

Marie Bellville, Treasurer

Cyndee Miske, Financial Secretary

John Barry

Jo-Nell Berger

Naomi Fletcher

Linda Levin

Kathy McDonough

Donna Mott

Teddy Nelson

Cindy Olli

Jim Russey



A congregation of the Northern Great Lakes Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.