

October 1, 2020

Dear friends,

First, I continue to miss you all and miss our Sunday morning gatherings, where we sang as loud or as soft as we wanted, where we gave and took Holy Communion, where we drank coffee before worship and hugged in the receiving line after.

I also miss the rhythm of our fall: Sunday evenings with H2H confirmation, SUPPLY outings, Bible Bootcamp with donuts, and the final Confirmation classes with 9th graders.

I miss Committee meetings and the energy and ministry they envisioned and then put into action. Worship, Outreach, Agape, Property, CARE Team.

There are many more things I miss and I know your list is as long as mine, with some differences, but equally weighty.

The first purpose of my letter is to ask you to fill out a survey that will be published next week. As we learn more about coronavirus, and as restrictions have been levied, then lifted, levied and lifted, we feel it is a good time to check in on people's comfort levels with different options for worship and community. Please fill out this survey so we can get a sense of the varying comfort levels in order to offer relevant worship and connection options. Council will be considering these options at their next meeting, keeping in mind our spiritual needs and capabilities and your feedback.

The second purpose of my letter is to address the upcoming fall and winter seasons at New Life. The things we know is that the construction has wrapped up in our building and we ran out of daylight at our midweek outdoor prayer service. What we don't know is the exact form for gathering and worship that best fits New Life now. We are actively thinking thru connection possibilities and worship options. We hope to give you something to look forward to while also realizing that for which we'll continue to wait. What follows is not the complete picture as there is still lots of unknown.

Worship

Because I continue to hear from folks who choose to stay more home than not during this pandemic, my first worship priority will be making worship videos. The videos can be for the whole congregation, as well as visitors. Sunday morning, indoor, in-person worship service is an option, but it raises health and safety concerns, comes with many logistics, and the difficult premise of little fellowshiping before or after service.

Sunday morning, outdoor, in-person worship is not a long term sustainable option due to weather. But we know the longing to worship together is there. So we will be offering an outdoor worship service on Sunday October 25 (Reformation Sunday!) at two different times. If we need a rain date, it will be November 1 (All Saints' Sunday!) Stay tuned for times and lots of

details. I'm working with our office staff on all the logistics to gather safely. I'm working with music leaders to craft services that give us a taste of what we've been missing. And we are also striving to find a safe way to do Holy Communion together. I know. Finally.

Community Life

Because the worship videos provide worship in the broadest sense to all of New Life, we have shifted our focus in the office to providing connections within the community. Faith 5 Videos every Monday keep us using our faith in our households to stay connected to each other and God. We have already experimented with an outdoor H2H gathering (we need better computer speakers but whiffle ball is a hit!) Your input in the survey will be crucial in assisting the creation of more and appropriate connection opportunities. Because the pandemic makes gathering together difficult, and because New Life committee structure is still fairly quiet, we need longer lead times to put together brand new ways of doing ministry.

Thanksgiving & Christmas

We know questions about the holidays are already dotting conversations over pandemic-comfort-food. In November, we are planning a short series, available by zoom, led by Rev. Al Creighton. Al has a Master's in Pastoral Care and his wisdom will help us prepare for, process, and grieve a very different holiday season.

And Christmas. We are thinking and praying through what Advent & Christmas might be for New Life. We will strive to find a way to safely gather (perhaps offering multiple, short services or late-night outdoor caroling with candles?) and welcome the Son of God into our midst again. How dearly we need his light! It will be a different Christmas on all levels of our lives; but we will still help you mark our Savior's birth in meaningful ways.

2021

We anticipate turning the calendar and still finding ourselves worshipping primarily via video. While we all pray mightily for breakthroughs in the scientific community, we choose not to flinch so we can see the coronavirus pandemic for what it is and the danger it still poses. We hold the safety and well-being of New Lifers as paramount. We will absolutely commence indoor, in-person Sunday morning worship when larger gatherings are once again considered low-risk. That may be before a vaccine is widely distributed. It may not. We believe that we remain held by God and if we're safely there, we can wait this out.

This is temporary. Keep praying.
Stay connected. You are loved and missed.

Pastor Rakel