



Sharing Christ's Love, Growing God's Family

August 25, 2020

An Update from Council on Worship and Fall Plans at Community of Joy

Dear Community of Joy,

Due to the realities of Covid-19, it has now been several months since we last held a “normal” worship service in our building. And although we continue to worship, connect, and be God’s people in other ways, we know that many of you long to be together and are eager to hear about what to expect from our ministry in the coming months. And so, having prayerfully and thoughtfully considered guidance from health officials and our synod leadership, as well as the needs of our community, we write to share some updates about what the future holds for Community of Joy and our life and ministry together.

New Synod Guidelines

Earlier this month Bishop Gonia released new guidelines that outline a number of recommendations for navigating ministry in this pandemic landscape. This letter - which you can find attached - has many helpful considerations to ponder, but the main takeaways are that: 1) Due to ongoing health risks, our synod does not recommend indoor public worship, likely through the end of the year; 2) The synod does recommend that congregations “prioritize worship opportunities that are safe, accessible, invitational, meaningful, and sustainable...”

In terms of what this second point means, Bishop Gonia goes on to specifically recommend that congregations continue to invest in quality digital worship opportunities. And while he does not recommend large, in-person church gatherings within buildings, he does recommend:

...that congregations and communities of faith continue to offer low-risk, in-person gatherings tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of the various people within your setting for the sake of the emotional, physical, communal, and missional health and well-being of the congregation.

Council has agreed that these recommendations seem like the moral and sensible way to proceed under our present circumstances. For one thing, they continue to prioritize the health of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, while also taking seriously the spiritual needs of our community. Moreover, they align with the direction that most of our public institutions - such as schools - are also taking. And though at the time of writing we have seen some improvement of local Covid-19 infection rates, we can see from other states and organizations that these gains often disappear shortly after indoor public gatherings resume and restrictions ease. It seems that we may need to wait for a widely available vaccine before indoor public gatherings are truly safe and advisable.

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Our Ministry Plans for the Months Ahead

That being said, even as we observe the above restrictions, your Council and staff remain deeply committed to meeting the spiritual needs of our community. *And though we are choosing to refrain from indoor worship gatherings through the end of the year - based on feedback from the community and the bishop's recommendations - we are excited to announce that we will begin holding outdoor worship services at Community Joy starting Sunday, September 13th.*

We are so excited to begin this new worship ministry! But there are a number of details that still need to be worked out. In particular, we are in need of volunteers to help with audio setup and music, so let us know if you would like to help. Please also rest assured that these outdoor services will follow the same precautions that we recently observed at our Remembrance Service - meaning that seating will be distanced and masks will be mandatory.

Beyond these outdoor services, we will also be offering various at-home and digital forms of outreach over the next few weeks. For youth and children, we are making plans for an at-home Sunday School program, digital confirmation, and digital youth outreach - all of which will begin after Labor Day. We will also continue to offer digital opportunities for adult education and small groups, which have been going strong throughout this time. Be sure to stay connected to the weekly email for news on these ministries.

Lastly, with the many challenges that we are all facing and that have faced this congregation, we want to express our deep thanks to you for all of your love, support, and prayers. In this time, so many of you have given of yourselves in so many ways, and because of this we are entering fall in a strong position. And with God's Spirit and your continued support, we know that we will reach the other side of this pandemic full of strength and ready to share the JOY of the gospel as much as ever before.

So, this is the plan we are working toward. Have any ideas, questions, or ways that you would like to help? Let your staff or council know.

Yours in Christ,

Church Council and Pastor Paul