



May 22, 2020

## Meeting in the Middle with Love

One of the things this pandemic has done is spark creativity in the artists and curators of art and other forms of expression. I'm amazed by the poetry and the music that bubbles up on social media and on TV. One such reflection came across my newsfeed. These are words by Cameron Bellm:

*While we grieve our closed churches,  
I wonder if, maybe,  
just maybe,  
Jesus is happy  
He's been let out of the constraints  
of the physical church building  
for a little while -  
Free to stretch His long limbs of love  
in the world.  
Since we can't go in to Him,  
I imagine Him coming out to us.  
I imagine His neck stiff  
from resting His sacred head on our stone altars,  
His elbows cramped  
from bending to fit into the transepts,  
His holy feet  
always pressed against the doors to the narthex.  
I imagine Him bending double  
to step through our low entrances  
and out into crowning wreathes of cherry blossoms.  
I imagine him traversing our cities,*

*wiping away tears with the hem of His robe,  
offering bread to those who need it,  
keeping vigil, fingertips blessing blazing foreheads,  
with all those who die alone.  
We long to return to our churches,  
Incense sanctifying our plaster and stone.  
But Jesus lives and breathes out here among us,  
and every molecule of oxygen  
is holy air.*

Earlier this week, you should have received a letter from council indicating our initial plan to return to worship at phase three of the Badger Bounce Back plan. While the ruling of the Wisconsin Supreme Court stands – there are increased risks to being gathered at Saint Andrew, in church, at this time. We do not wait to gather again out of fear – we wait to gather so no one is left behind.

With a mission statement that has at its heart “Open to all” – for us to gather with the possibility of turning anyone away because we are over a suggested limit – or to tell anyone they should not come (like people over a certain age or with a higher level of vulnerability) – does not align with the mission of Saint Andrew, to be “Open to all.” Saint Andrew is closed to no one – but rather, open to all. We are open to all when it is easy and we are open to all when it is not easy.

We also have some practical work to do. A team is being formed now to review CDC guidelines and work with the Marathon County Health Department to ensure our opening is done with best practices in mind. As you might imagine, even how we share communion is being examined. Even as we return it may be a while yet before we can share in communion or public singing (see more below). While that work is going on, ministries are also meeting. Faith Formation is discussing alternate plans for VBS. Finance ministry will meet next week. Member Outreach is working to sustain relationships with those feeling more disconnected. Worship ministry has met twice and will help us to better discern some options.

While the future is uncertain, we do have good, solid, plans in place to get you back to church as soon as is safely possible. We are all listening to different voices on this matter – different health care providers and news outlets. We have each given different authority to the voices of the governor, or the white house, or the legislature of our state, or the CDC. Because of this, there is much skepticism, much loss, much confusion and the very real truth is – we will not all agree. We can let this disagreement break down our dear church – or build it up.

On the church council are business leaders, insurance professionals, parents, grandparents, financial advisors, people who work for local manufacturers, in food service, and in the corporate world. These council members love Saint Andrew and have been elected and are representing you well. Without them I know I would feel lost. Please join me in praying for them as they guide us through this time. Even though we may ultimately disagree about the approach that the church council and Pastor Justin and I are taking, or about our neighbor’s approach to covid-19 and all of its complexities – we have an opportunity to be a church where our mission is to meet in the middle with love.

I would encourage you to meet others in the middle with the love of Christ as your highest priority. Far beyond any news story shared on facebook, or any video on

twitter, or any list of statistics – far above any anxiety stirring deep within your chest, any glimpses of grief or anger or pain – Jesus’ love will be what carries us through – and what carries you through.

Although we may be wrong in our approach, if we err – let us all commit to erring on the side of love. This is then what ultimately will unite us in Christ.

*Pr. Jenn*

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## "Plan to Gather": Zoom Listening Sessions

While there are many approaches to returning to gathering, church council has approved a phase approach to gathering. The Saint Andrew "Plan to Gather" details how we will begin the process of gathering in three phases. At each phase, council will reassess and communicate with you – since factors seem to constantly change.

Pastor Jenn and Council members will be sharing information through four Zoom sessions. You are invited to call in via phone or join us on line to participate in a 20 minute overview presentation about how the decision for Saint Andrew was made led by Pr. Jenn followed by time for Q & A. All that is needed to call in by phone is the phone number, meeting ID, and passwords listed below. To participate via voice and video, you will need the Zoom app on your phone, tablet or computer and the link below.

### **Tuesday, May 26 – 9:00 am**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83705648309?pwd=UmhKTUMxVWJqb1VoMW5CLzNtSORKQT09>

Or you can call in by using this phone number: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 837 0564 8309

Password: 047412

### **Tuesday, May 26 – 6:15 pm**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88458913295?pwd=S0ppYTdENEkzc0YxTGx4L0FIL2RZQT09>

Or you can call in by using this phone number: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 884 5891 3295

Password: 710209

### **Wednesday, May 28 – 12:15 pm**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89448123008?pwd=cFM2TG1BZE1Xc2VZc0VhSXNGMW1TZz09>

Or you can call in by using this phone number: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 894 4812 3008

Password: 553611

### **Saturday, May 30 – 9:30 am**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83546185252?pwd=ejJVMVV3N3U5ZGMwNmIMZE5oUTEvdz09>

Or you can call in by using this phone number: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 835 4618 5252

Password: 932350

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## "Plan to Gather" - Phase One Opening at Saint Andrew

You may begin to hear that some churches in our area are beginning to gather. On May 31, the Roman Catholic bishop for our area has permitted worship with sanctuaries at 25% capacity. [You can read that letter here.](#)

The bishop of our own synod, Rev. Jerry Mansholt aligns with the greater ELCA in his approach. [You can read his letter here](#), urging us to wait just a little longer to gather.

One caveat as you explore these letters and hear about openings: the Diocese of La Crosse and the East Central Synod of Wisconsin cover different geographical areas. Okay two caveats – our theology as Lutherans means that if ever we are to choose between Word and Sacrament – Martin Luther says – the Word holds primary. The Word is as effective in relaying God's grace to us as communion. In the Roman Catholic church, a higher sacramentology guides and leads a different theological approach to worship and to public ministry.

While the formal "Safer at Home" period came to a close last week – and was anticipated to come to a close after memorial day, [the gating criteria](#) put forward by the Wisconsin Department of Health still shows a need to be cautious. We now anticipate phase one as outlined in the *Badger Bounce Back* plan. What does phase one at Saint Andrew look like? [Here's what you can expect.](#)

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## Pandemics and the Church: Additional Resources

While there are so many resources available and many perspectives, these are the resources we have received from our greater church and are using to process this time in our life together. Please click on the title of the resource you would like to listen to or read.

### ***Church Music in the Age of Covid-19***

#### ***Singing in the Age of Covid-19***

*Video of Conversation between Rev. Kerri Parker, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and Dr. Geoffrey R. Swain, MD, MPH, Founding Director of the Wisconsin Center for Health Equity and volunteer for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.*

#### ***Returning to Church***

*Recommendations from the Wisconsin Council of Churches for churches that align with phases in Badger Bounce Back plan.*

#### ***Resources for Returning to In Person Worship***

*Recommendations for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

#### ***Lecture from Rev. Dr. Ben Stewart, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, on the Church and Holy Communion in Times of Pandemic***

Pr. Justin and I attended a lecture/presentation/Q&A session sponsored by the synod for pastors and deacons on the subject of communion. The presenter is Rev. Dr. Ben Stewart from the Lutheran School of theology at Chicago. He shares some history on the church in times of pandemic, then answers questions from pastors. The conversation is just a little over an hour and there are some sound interruptions and small talk at the beginning – but it levels out after about six minutes. If this is important for you, please give a listen.

### **Luther's Two Kingdoms Theology**

An article on Luther's two kingdoms theory that details the history of the relationship between the Lutheran church and the state in Lutheran Theology written by Rev. Dr. Craig Nesson, Wartburg Theological Seminary.

### **Dr. Michael Osterholm on the Pandemic and Reopening In Person Worship**

As churches work to return to in person worship - Dr. Osterholm is a leading epidemiologist and has been providing some insight and guidance. This is one of the experts Saint Andrew council members have listened to as they have worked to create a plan for phased reopening.

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## **Pr. Craig Celebrates 25th Anniversary of His Ordination**

Greetings!

Pastor Craig Swenson is celebrating his 25th anniversary of his ordination today.

As he served at Saint Andrew Lutheran in Wausau for 8 years of his ministry, we wanted to reach out and communicate this news to you with the hope that this could be shared with your congregation.



If people wanted to send a card to congratulate him, they can send it to Pastor Craig at the address below:

Salem Lutheran Church  
[1700 W. War Memorial Drive](#)  
[Peoria, IL 61614](#)

God's Blessings to all of you! We hope you are doing well!

Jason Lantz  
Salem Lutheran Church  
Congregational Council Vice President

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## **Member Survey**

While we were not able to gather for Saint Andrew's anniversary as we had hoped, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are connected as the body of Christ. Even though we

cannot gather in the church building, Saint Andrew's mission and ministry have not ended. Openness is more important than ever at a time when so much is "closed."

We are worshipping online, communicating weekly via e-mail, and working through the church directory to call every member, but we recognize that we may have missed you. Through [The Member Survey](#), we hope to reach those we have missed and hear feedback on how we might better be "open" to you - and stay connected at a time when it is necessary to remain apart.

God has designed us for connection and this difficult, even traumatic, time. Our faith is put to the test. When we look for it, we can see either the worst or the best of humanity. Know that your pastors pray for you daily and are available by phone, video conversation, or e-mail.

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