

October 9, 2020

Dear Saint Andrew members,



Just over six months ago I wrote a letter to you that began in this way,

I realize that many of you are already finding life being altered and plans being changed quite suddenly by the global, national, and local community responses to the news about COVID-19. There is much fear, many quick reactions, and lots of things about this virus that the world has yet to fully understand. As people of faith, during times like these, we are called to lean into God's promises but also take up God's invitation for us to be the church and respond with care for the poor, the vulnerable, the hurting, and the ailing.

Little did we know at that time that our corporate in-person worship would still be suspended as the leaves now begin to change and are carried to the ground by the wind – a reminder that it is the duty of every living thing to come to rest.

Professor Aisha Ahmad of the University of Toronto wrote about trends one can see in any disaster lasting longer than six months. She observes that at the six-month mark, we all have adjusted fairly well to a “new normal” but now might feel as though we are running out of steam. Yet, as epidemiologists have projected, we are only about 1/3 of the way through this crisis. Professor Ahmad writes:

*This is a very normal time to struggle or slump. I *always* hit a wall six months into a tough assignment in a disaster zone. The desire to “get away” or “make it stop” is intense. I’ve done this many times, and at 6 months, it’s like clockwork. This time, our crisis is global and there is nowhere to run... We’ve already re-learned how to do groceries, host meetings, and even teach classes. And we have found new ways to be*

happy and have fun. But as the days get shorter and colder, we need to be ready to innovate again.

This is my first pandemic, but not my first six-month wall. So what can I share to help you? First, the wall is real and normal. And frankly, it's not productive to try and ram your head through it. It will break naturally in about four to six weeks if you ride it out. Of course, there are things we have to do. Work. Teach. Cook. Exercise. But just don't expect to be sparkingly happy or wildly creative in the middle of your wall. Right now, if you can meet your obligations and be kind to your loved ones, you get an A+.

For almost seven months, we have been worshipping in the “life boat” of the live stream. As Covid case numbers increase in the state of Wisconsin, capacity at Aspirus and Ascension St. Clare hospitals is surging, and we see the President and First Lady in a process of recovery from Covid themselves, we recognize that Saint Andrew is connected to systems – and that what we do as a church has great impact.

As time presses on, life in Christian community can be strained. It can feel as though we are falling apart or “hitting a wall.” It is true that virtual gatherings are not the same as in person gatherings and some people are finding themselves feeling more isolated and alone than ever before. As a diverse group of people, some have responded with great affirmation about the response of leadership in leading us through this response at Saint Andrew. Others have voiced how very frustrating the response at Saint Andrew has been. We see trends in either affirmative or critical feedback and are learning from them. And still, Christ pulls us together through the Holy Spirit.

I want to assure you that the Church Council has met to discern these matters more than monthly. The Plan to Gather Task Force continues to provide sound guidance and care along the way. These men and women are people of faith and professionals in various fields of leadership throughout the greater Wausau community.

All in all – about 20 people are making decisions together for our dear church. The truth is, we do not all agree on how we should be moving forward at these times. But it is also true that through trust in the Holy Spirit and listening to the voices of the scientific and medical communities, we have been able to come to a consensus based on objective criteria to create a plan. While it is painful to disagree, we trust that we will come through this time stronger for having wrestled with these complex matters, and we all agree that the mission of Christ Jesus as expressed through the mission of Saint Andrew is our guiding light during these hard and complex times.

In order to get an accurate reading of what the pulse of our community sounds like now that we are more than six months in, the leadership of Saint Andrew, Pr. Justin, and I would like to hear from you. We have designated time for eight structured listening sessions. After briefly sharing an overview of the plan, we intend to be quiet

and would like to listen to you. More specifically, we would like to know: *What is your greatest frustration with or appreciation of the Covid-19 response at Saint Andrew? How can we better meet the mission of Saint Andrew during these times?*

Please see the [attached schedule](#) and register in advance to attend one of these sessions. We are limiting groups to 12 people each to ensure that everyone has time to speak and be heard. If needed, we will schedule more sessions. Fred Rogers once said, “In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.”

A Covid-19 landing page with the full “Plan to Gather” (revised and adopted by council on October 1), criteria for decision making, and history of the Saint Andrew response will soon be available for your review on the church’s website at www.salc-wausau.org/covid. If you do not have ease of access to the website or would prefer a paper copy of the plan mailed to you, please call the church office.

If you are struggling during these times, the pastoral team and the community at Saint Andrew is here to support you. Our contact information is below and we will do our very best to walk beside you – even as you endeavor in faith – to stay in the boat as we weather this storm together.

My first letter to you ended in this way and may it be just as true for you now...

We were baptized for times like these. We need not be afraid. In this season of sabbath from large gatherings, while we may be invited to consider social distance from one another, we are not distant from one another as siblings in Christ. We are never distant from God, who holds us close and reminds us of the love that God has for us in tangible ways.

God bless and keep you,

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