



We Go Out to Transform Lives Through Jesus Christ.

May 28, 2020

Dear River of Hope-er,

Grace and peace to you from our Savior Jesus Christ!

If anyone had told you on Valentine's day that we would be a part of a worldwide pandemic response which includes staying home and wearing masks when in public, would you have believed them? I'm not sure I could have imagined this! Regardless, here we are trying to figure out how to safely do the most basic things such as purchasing groceries, getting our kids to school and – worshipping.

Worshipping in person has been the focus of news stories and conversations for the past week. The conversations have a wide variety of opinions. Everything from; "If we can go to Wal-mart, we should be able to go to church" to "It isn't safe yet, we should continue to worship at home." So, what do WE do?

Well, we will continue to do what we have always done – we will be the church, "going out to transform lives through Jesus Christ." That said, things are clearly different and we all wonder, when will things return to the way they were before March 15th.

The question is too big for any one person to answer. In the tradition of lay leadership that has always been sewn into the fabric of River of Hope, we have formed a "Folding Table" called "River of Hope COVID-19 Response Table". The table is made up of the Executive team (**Scott Gross-Sand, President; Kris Hartman, Vice-President; Sue Benson, Treasurer; Portia Brandsoy, Secretary**), the chair of the Call Committee (**Nan Crary**), RoH staff members (**Jim, Emily and me**) at large member (**Sara Nelson**) and 2 members of the medical profession (**Brian Pollmann, Sara Shorter**)

Our first meeting was last night, May 25, 2020. We spoke of the timing for returning to in person worship. **Our decision is, at this point we will continue to worship virtually and NOT in –person.** Here are the highlights of our discussion:

- One of our values as a congregation is the well-being of the community. Until it is safe for all of River of Hope, it isn't safe for any of us. We know that we continue to be church, even if meeting in a different way!

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- What about that “Wal-mart” question?
 - Brian Pollmann helped us understand that in order for the virus to spread it needs two things: Proximity (closer than 6 feet) and time (5 minutes or more).
 - In stores like Wal-Mart, Cash Wise, Target, etc... there are markers to keep people 6 feet apart in line and people rarely, if ever, interact for 5+ minutes.
 - Worship, on the other hand, we can seat people 6 feet apart, but we will be in an enclosed room for a minimum of 40 minutes – far exceeding what is safe.
- There are faith communities that are meeting in-person in Hutchinson right now. Do they know something that we don’t know? How will we decide when to return to in-person worship?
 - The RoH Covid-19 Response Table will continue to meet as needed to determine the ever changing landscape and the viability to returning to in-person worship. All congregations are operating with the same information and will make decisions based on their own core values.
 - We respect each congregation’s individual choice. As mentioned above, the COVID-19 response Table will meet regularly to assess the current situation with our core values.
- Are there other types of gatherings that can be considered safe?
 - Yes! This past week we had a wonderful Graduate Parade! We will continue to find ways to celebrate milestones together in safe ways.
 - Yes! As we are entering into summer we can consider meeting outdoors for Bible study or Table meetings.
 - Yes! We are looking into the possibility of worshipping outdoors during July as a way to celebrate our 10th anniversary of meeting together.
- Are there other things we should be considering?
 - Yes! We are aware that, during a time when we do not meet in person it can be **financially difficult for a congregation**. We are exploring the option of some of the non-profit grants available to help bridge this time.
 - Yes! **The work of the call committee** continues to move forward. Nan is in communication with the Synod office and will be calling the committee together soon.

The Folding Table will continue to keep you in the loop as we meet and discuss our life together in this pandemic. Please feel free to reach out to me or any of the above named members of the table if you have a question or concern.

As we continue to walk together in faith through this time of uncertainty, we remain, as always, a congregation committed to loving God and loving our neighbor.

In Christ,

Pastor Janine

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