

CORNERSTONE

"THERE IS A PLACE FOR YOU AT ST. PAUL'S"

May 2020

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Volume 26, Issue 5

Longing for Holy Communion

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*In the night in which He was betrayed,
Our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
Broke it, and gave to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, He took the cup,
gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.¹*

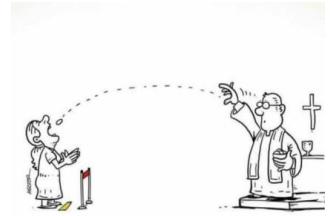


Have you been longing to hear those words? Are you eagerly waiting for the time when we can come together and once again be in fellowship and share this beloved sacrament in our respective church sanctuaries? When will that be? On March 15, when we started this journey of suspending our in-person worship to care for each other by honoring the physical distancing guidelines, did we think that it would be this long before we were able to gather once again? What about communion? Not during Holy Week and Easter! We didn't even get the opportunity to do it **one last** time to prepare ourselves.

During this COVID-19 pandemic we have experienced many losses ...the inability to hug love ones, see our friends and church families. We have had to make many adjustments...limited time in the grocery stores, wearing masks and gloves, working from home or not working, and even worshipping through technology. While we have valiantly adapted to each of those expectations, one of the hardest has been not gathering for Holy Communion! How much longer? Other churches are doing it, so why not us? It is "unLutheran" not to have communion every week! I need it to get me going each week!

We acknowledge the longing for communion in our weekly worship. Yes, as Lutherans the sacrament of communion is an important part of how we experience the presence of Jesus. For many coming before God, confessing our sins and seeking forgiveness seems fully attained when we engage in the Lord's Supper. So on what basis are we justifying this absence? There are several factors that have guided the PLUM Pastoral Team:

On the most basic, practical level, WE have not been able to identify a safe way to administer the sacrament without putting someone at risk. We have reviewed all the various techniques and have not landed on one. Reducing the risk of infecting each other is the very reason we are physically distancing. We believe it would be irresponsible of us to place any of our flock in harm's way.



¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship , setting one, pg 109

Equally important is the why of communion. As Lutherans we believe that Jesus is present in the reading and preaching of the gospel. Martin Luther argues that it is through the reading and hearing of the text (the Biblical scripture) that Jesus “forgives us, heals us, and raises us from the dead.”² Luther also wrote that the Lord’s Supper is a proclamation of the Gospel. It is not a magical act but rather a visible form of the Word. To put it more plainly, the presence of Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:1-4). Communion reminds us of our forgiveness but it is not the source. It points us to the source – Jesus! When we come together for Bible Study we experience Jesus. Each Sunday we gather for worship we are still experiencing Jesus. Differently, yes! We remain consistent in our belief by engaging in a Service of the Word.



Finally, both Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Bishop Kurt Kusserow have encouraged us to care for the body – you – by fasting from communion until we are able to practice this discipline safely in community with each other. Communion in our individual spaces would be like preparing a huge thanksgiving feast and eating it alone. It misrepresents what is intended- the gathering and assembling around **Word** and **Sacrament**. Jesus intended for the meal to be shared in community. It was how He ate the last meal with his disciples. Communion is a discipline we do when as the body of Christ we gather in fellowship together. And we look forward to being able to do so once again.

WE understand not gathering; not having Holy Communion is difficult. We are all longing for this beloved sacrament. Yet how grateful we are that Jesus’ abiding presence remains with us always even until such time as we are able to gather again.

We encourage you to seek Jesus’ presence in the reading and hearing of the Biblical word. We offer this prayer to include in your devotion time.



Prayer of Holy Commitment

Beloved Jesus,
I believe that you are present in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
I love you above all things, and I desire to experience your presence more fully through the sharing of your body and blood.
Since I cannot at this moment receive you physically,
I trust you to be present with me spiritually and abide in my heart.
I embrace you because you are already here and I unite myself wholly to you.
Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.³



The peace of Christ be with us all,
Pastor Brenda
On behalf of the PLUM Pastoral Team

² Tim Wenger

³ Adapted from the Act of Spiritual Communion

STEWARDSHIP

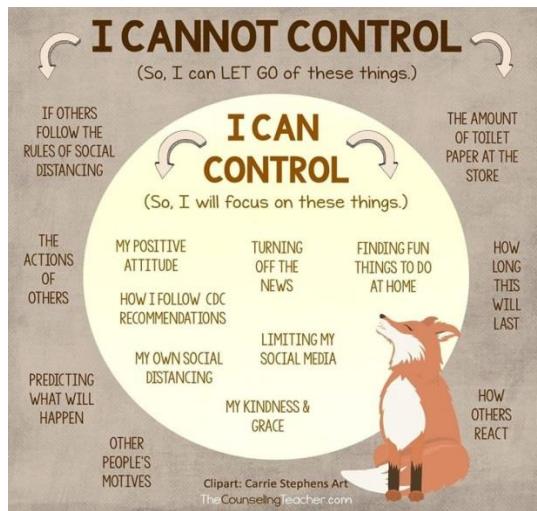
WILL COVID19 DISSUADE US FROM OUR MISSION STATEMENT?

"On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' " John 20:19-22.

We are surely living through some disconcerting times with COVID19. All of us have had our wings clipped to varying degrees; and like the disciples, many of us are behind locked doors in fear of the pandemic which surrounds us, uncertain of our futures. We are barred from our church and socializing with many of our friends, not to mention family members who may be in other parts of the country. Our new garb is a face covering to protect those around us, and we live in fear of giving our family members and those close to us the virus which we may or may not have...so we choose to err on the side of caution and stay secluded. And then, there are those who are serving on the front lines risking their own lives using their gifts and talents to keep us and others safe. However, as Christians, God has not left us high and dry—we too, like the disciples, have been given the Holy Spirit to help us.

The temporary closing of our doors does not mean the ministry of the church has ceased. Our pastoral team continues to work extremely hard in learning new skill sets that have enabled all of us to stay connected. They remain vigilant in trying to stay in touch with members of the congregation, and working as a team, have continued to offer Bible studies and worship experiences, especially during Holy Week. Nor has the ministry of the church ceased with us. Very quickly we have learned that we must go outward in ministry rather than focusing inwardly. Perhaps that is a positive that COVID19 has offered us. Being uniquely made, each of us has been given the gifts of time, talent, and resources. For some, and perhaps most, time has become more plentiful because we are not out circulating as much. Regarding talents, each of us has been given talents that can be offered in ministry. So, what can we offer at St. Paul's collectively as well as individually? What do our neighbors need? Do we need to reevaluate the definition of neighbor?

Lastly, there are our resources. Because of COVID19, there are those that have been impacted heavily due to unemployment or a loss of a job. Then there are those who have not been impacted as much because their incomes have remained secure through pensions or social security. And some are experiencing temporary increases in income and/or reduced expenses. But the work of the church continues. The expenses of the church continue even when we are not there. It is also likely that expenses are increasing from those seeking additional assistance from the church given our current public health crisis. In Acts 2:42-47, the disciples gathered and sustained one another as the need arose. This provides us a beautiful example of community. During these times, perhaps those who have been impacted less might help carry some of the financial loss of those who normally would be giving more to the church. Additionally, you may be one who has benefitted financially from initiatives during our present epidemic and have made or are considering a stewardship decision to share funds with an outreach ministry of one or more PLUM congregations. The Lord asks us to give according to how we have been blessed. **Our offerings can either be mailed to the church or dropped off at the church between 10:00-4:00 on May 14 and/or May 28th. (a container is between the doors of the office).** If you would like to designate donations to one of our PLUM congregations such as the Trinity Lutheran, Mt. Oliver Diaper Bank, Lutheran Church of Our Saviour's Blessed Bundles, East Liberty Lutheran's Feeding Ministry, or Food Pantries run by a number of our congregations, please give through your home congregation, who will then forward these designated funds to the appropriate congregation ministry. **St. Paul's May mission emphasis is Mission Support. Also donations can still be made for Monday Pop-up Pantry at the Presbyterian Church in Canonsburg.** COVID19 does not restrict us in all ways; for now we may just have to get a little more creative in how we achieve our mission statement: **To Grow in Faith and Carry Out the Work of Jesus Christ in Our World.** See you in church on Sunday at 3:00 p.m. via zoom.



In God We Trust

This statement is embossed on American currency, yet today some question the relevancy of these words and the validity of their imprint on money. Trust, and more importantly, in whom and what we place our hope can vary greatly and many of the differences are situated within basic demographics—age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. The notion of trust had a drastically different meaning several months ago, regardless of demographics. One day that may come to mind is Ash Wednesday 2020. As we began our annual Lenten journey, we anticipated fish fries, Bible studies, prayer, meditation, and fasting. All in preparation for the Easter celebration in April. And then, in a relatively short time, our worlds were turned upside down with information about a widespread virus posing a threat on the United States. This was no longer a long-distance problem being observed from afar...it was in our neighborhoods, schools and businesses. The level of fear and anxiety has been compared to that of 9-11. But this was much different. After 9-11, activities began to return to some kind of normal within a week or so...as businesses began to reopen, students returned to classes, and airplanes returned to the sky. April 26th will mark the two-month anniversary since Ash Wednesday 2020, and most are still awaiting some glimpse of “normal” and yet the waves of fear and anxiety continue.

Our human response to these events is understandable. Fear is an emotion in which our bodies typically respond with fight/flight/freeze. Anxiety symptoms (hyperventilating, racing heartbeat, sweaty palms, panic sensation) are the body’s response to prolonged worry; mostly about the future...will things ever be normal or will it always be like this? Some may ask, does fear lead to anxiety or just the opposite; or perhaps they go hand-in-hand? One new term that’s recently surfaced is “anticipatory grief,” which refers to feelings of grief occurring before an impending loss. The impending loss refers to our future as we think about what it might look like instead of what we may have hoped for.

We could review the scientific research about our autonomic nervous system (composed of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems) and how their function in stress situations lead to experiencing fear and anxiety due to changes in our brain chemistry resulting in these bodily responses; but can the information be trusted coming from a non-scientist such as myself? And besides, there’s not all that much interest in the scientific origins behind fear and anxiety symptoms. We just want it all to stop and go back to normal, right?

So, we rely upon our instincts and intuition to guide our actions and responses in these stressful times. This may translate into a desperate hunt to satisfy our appetite for information. As with other traumatic events, we turn to mainstream media but now there’s also social media as additional information resources; at our fingertips in an instant! But oh, how to determine which resources are reliable and trustworthy? Wading through the massive amount of media information can be overwhelming in itself. Some put their trust in local television and radio and others prefer larger, mainstream media (some might call this old-school thinking). While others put their trust in live press conferences by governmental leaders. Still others place their faith in the opinions and postings of

celebrities, family and friends on social media. Who to trust? Where to turn? What's reliable? Are there any concrete answers about our future?

None of the above resources can impart God's wisdom to any of us. Which begs the bigger question, is it in God we truly trust? We may reach out to God in prayer, imploring Him for guidance and strength in these troubled times, but what do you hear? In these times, I'm reminded of the story of Samuel (1 Samuel 3). You may recall this is the story of Eli and Samuel where they lie down, the Lord speaks to Samuel but Samuel is confused and thinks it's Eli speaking. Once Eli provides Samuel with a suggested response, Samuel then responds appropriately to the Lord's call, who imparts a message of His coming actions in Israel. Samuel was then recognized as a prophet of the Lord.

How closely are we listening to God's words and more importantly what's our response? Trust in the words of the Lord is anchored in our faith. While there are physical challenges to participating in worship, there are no restrictions to access God's word and our appetite for information can be satisfied in His word. But we must also listen and trust that when the Lord imparts a message to us of love, hopefulness and helpfulness that we then pass this along to others by whatever means available. A card, letter or telephone call reaching out to someone with wishes for a blessed day or that you're keeping them in thoughts and prayers can make a difference in the world of another, especially when the actions are accomplished out of trust rooted in God's inspiration. We can't go back and tomorrow is unknown so how about we live for today?

Just for today, I will let go of anger.

Just for today, I will let go of worry.

Just for today, I will give thanks for my many blessings.

Just for today, I will do my work honestly.

Just for today, I will be kind to my neighbor and every living thing.

You would be amazed at the things you can do, just for today.

Kathy Hays

Kathy Hays is a long-time member of Christ Church Duquesne and PLUM Board member. She is also a licensed professional counselor (LPC) in Pennsylvania providing counseling services to the PLUM congregations and their church communities.



Keep in your prayers: Anna Mae, Alex, Mark, Albert, Jason, Pam, Virginia, Misty, Matthew, Jennifer, Betty Jane, Rich, Rachel, Pat, Donna, Randy, Anna Mae, Eddie, Steve, Barbara, Tom, Charlotte, John, Kelly, Mike, Colin, Tracey, Carol Jean, Matthew, the Miller, Paulick, Galano, Burchesky, Mele, Richmond families, all those suffering from the coronavirus, our Bishops, our Synod, our PLUM pastors and members and our church.



**May 7 – Cindy Nimal; May 9 – Mark Pollo; May 14 – Pastor John Gropp; May 17 – Josh Layton;
May 18 - Chuck Nimal; May 29 – Pastor Paul Koch; May 30 – Lee Jones; May 31 – Mike Richmond**



Greetings from **Camp Agape**,

Camp is a powerful experience for our youth.

The stress and fear of what is going on with COVID19 is affecting our children too! Parents are working overtime to keep their children actively engaged and moving forward.

Being a part of a community is part of being Christian. And, as Christians we thrive on creating good for everyone! It is important that in this time of uncertainty that we all work together to help those in need, and even if it cannot be physically in person, it can be a prayer, a phone call, a video-call, or a virtual hug. We CAN join worship services online and connect with our pastors remotely.

At **Camp Agape** we know that camp brings joy and hope for so many. We recommend taking your families outside as much as possible for activities that keep everyone moving. Enjoy this time together playing games or helping each other with schoolwork. Plan quiet time to read books together and join in prayer.

Our staff is using this time to develop and expand our summer and fall programs if we are permitted to open this summer. There is also construction of a new kitchen and duplex cabin happening there. Keep the staff and the construction people in your prayers as they work during this difficult time.

After weeks of isolation, we are committed to bringing this amazing community back together for the best summer camp and fall programs ever! When we are once again able to gather at **Camp Agape**, we want your hearts to be filled with the joy and power of God's love through the songs, skits, Bible studies and activities of camp and this holy community. Most importantly, we continue to lift up our campers, guests and congregations in prayer and ask you to do the same for **Camp Agape**.

We know that children will need camp now more than ever, even while a growing number of families will find themselves with limited income. That is why we are increasing our efforts toward raising Camper Scholarship dollars at this critical time. Thank you for your continued annual support of the ministry, your gift changes everything.

The camp board will be meeting on Saturday, May 16th to make some decisions on what will happen this summer at Camp Agape. Keep us in your prayers as we look forward.

Sincerely in Christ,
Jill Shook
Board President

Rick Frederick
Executive Director

Karen Reardon
Program Director