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November 18, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ at Peace,

Months have passed since my last letter to you. The world has changed; our country has changed; our lives have changed. And yet I write to you today with the firm conviction that God our Father does not change. He continues to provide for all our needs of body and soul as part of our daily bread. Thanks be to God!

I wanted to update you on the conversation and decisions that were made at last night's Board of Directors meeting. At each meeting for the past six months the Board members and I have conversed about how worship gatherings are going.

My report to the Board last night shared that this past Sunday was the first Sunday that we noticed a marked decrease in attendance due to COVID. (There was a Sunday back a few weeks with few in attendance, but that was mainly due to Fall Break vacations.) I believe the decrease this week had to do with increased cases of COVID in our area, combined with a Remind text that I sent out to many members. Our sense as a Board was that people are very concerned about the virus and are choosing to stay safe, away from large gatherings.

In addition, as we looked into December, I shared that I received an email from our musician who was slated to lead our Advent By Candlelight. The musician politely withdrew from playing; he was concerned about the gathering and the spread of virus. This also prompted much conversation from Board members about the other occasional holiday services that we traditionally have in the month of December.

So...we have before us another difficult situation. We want to gather for worship; but, presently, gathering together significantly increases the chance of virus spread.

In light of this, **the Board of Directors unanimously voted to alter our worship gatherings in the following ways:**

1. All Wednesday evening midweek Advent worship services in December, as well as the New Year's Eve worship service on the 31st, will be available **ONLINE ONLY**. We will NOT gather together for in-person worship for those midweek services.
2. We will continue to gather for Sunday morning worship for the time being. **However, beginning December 1, if Steuben County, Indiana is labeled "Red" because of COVID cases, our weekend in-person worship will be suspended, until we move out of the Red category.**
3. Online worship for weekend services will continue to be provided.
4. Christmas Eve, landing on a Thursday, is still yet to be decided. We are praying that we will be able to meet, but if the county is in the Red category, online worship only will be used.

(Please continue to the other side.)

4. The blue tape will go back up on the pew benches to help prompt people to once again social distance.
5. Finally, Saturday evening service will continue to be on hiatus, at least through the end of Easter.

I recognize that this is a confusing time as we head into the holiday weeks. But I ask you to please remember that we are hoping and planning to do our part to love our neighbor and care for them in their bodily needs, according to the fifth commandment. This is about loving our neighbor as ourselves. I liken it to difficult decisions when we get snow - we don't want people out, possibly getting injured or injuring others.

To recap:

- ◆ We **WILL HAVE** in-person worship this coming weekend, 11/22 and 11/29.
- ◆ We **WILL HAVE** in-person worship on Thanksgiving Eve.
- ◆ We **WILL NOT HAVE** midweek Wednesday worship at all in December: neither four Advent services nor our New Year's Eve service.
- ◆ Beginning December 1, **IF OUR STEUBEN COUNTY IS RATED RED BY THE INDIANA GOVERNMENT'S WEBSITE, WE WILL SUSPEND** in-person Sunday worship until our county is downgraded. (This map can be found at: www.coronavirus.in.gov/)
- ◆ Thursday evening services on Christmas Eve are, as yet, to be determined, based on Steuben County's rating.

As you have done, please continue to make good, sound, and healthy decisions for yourselves, for your friends and family, and for the entire community. *The virus continues to plague our community, and we continue to act with appropriate caution and sensitivity! Thank you for your care and concern for yourself and others!*

I continue to be willing and able to set up **PRIVATE COMMUNION VISITS** during the week. Please send me an email (PastorT@plcms.org) or call me to set up a time (260-495-4306x302).

Finally, as in weeks before:

1. **We will continue to use the Internet for our worship broadcasts.** Please utilize these services as appropriate to your situation. And we will continue using our website (plcms.org) and Facebook (facebook.com/plcms) for links to services, resources, and additional announcements.
2. Our staff will be working from home occasionally again.
3. Our weekly e-newsletter will continue to be sent out with information and announcements; PLEASE READ IT OVER! If you have not received it, please check your SPAM/Junk folders. If it isn't there, email Gina and she will get you on our contact list (GTeeple@plcms.org).
4. We will continue to send out Remind text and email notifications of sudden changes. Please call the church office and sign up to be a part of that method of communication!

Finally, as we head into the season of Advent, the familiar word of the Lord from Isaiah 9:2&6 carries special meaning this year:

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. [...]
For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

God grant us peace, in Jesus Christ.
Pastor Jeffrey Teeple