



# Messiah Lutheran Church

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*This is a digitized edition of an e-mail sent to all MLC members on June 5, 2020.*

June 5, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of Messiah Lutheran Church,

**This is a difficult letter to write.** The church council and staff of Messiah want to update you regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and how we as a church can begin to move toward a new normal. Though we have begun formulating a plan for resumption of in-person worship, we cannot give you a date when we will physically gather as a congregation. We simply do not know when that will be. The rate of infection in Alabama is rising, and we do not know how long this will persist. That said...

**MLC is not closed.** Weekly Sunday Services of Worship are on our website: mlutheran.org. Our Outreach Missions continue to be supported financially. Youth and Adult classes and activities are online, (see Enews and Messenger newsletter). The Instrumental Ensemble recently practiced outdoors and recorded a piece for Sunday worship. Creative Fellowship gatherings happen electronically, and our Facility is well maintained.

Recently, the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA published guidelines for churches. It included a link to a [fifty-seven-page extended guide](#) introducing a framework that congregations should use for phased reopening for gatherings. The summary section of this document introduces the problem in this way:

*The global pandemic of COVID-19 continues to ravish our region, our country, and our world. More than a quarter-million people have lost their lives to COVID-19; many more have been hospitalized. The disease is highly contagious and can cause severe illness and death in anyone. All are at risk, regardless of race, age, religion, occupation, and health status. Up to 50% of transmission of the virus causing COVID-19 can occur from people who have no symptoms. The virus is spread by close physical contact and exposed surfaces; the virus can spread at least 6 feet in the air, it can remain in the air for up to 3 hours, and it can remain on surfaces for 72 hours. There remains no vaccine or drug to cure COVID-19. Our only tactic to save lives, protect our loved ones, and show mercy to our neighbor is to physically distance ourselves (aka, social distancing). We must stay home as much as possible, wear cloth face coverings (i.e., masks), wash our hands frequently, and transition into a new normal way of life. Our pre-pandemic old way of life is over. It is not going to return. We can, however, successfully transition to a new normal that includes returning to in-person worship and other activities we desperately desire. But we must do so cautiously, methodically and thoughtfully.*

**The recommendations from the Southeastern Synod also pose four questions that congregations need to consider before moving forward with a plan to gather. The document phrases it this way:**

*If you answer NO to any of these critical questions, your congregation is not ready to move to the next phase.*

1. Does your local jurisdiction (state, county, city) allow you to have small gatherings?
2. Has your state shown a decrease in new daily cases for at least 21 days or more?

3. *Can individuals reliably and easily get tests for COVID-19 without having symptoms AND without being in a 'high risk group' (vulnerable population, frontline worker)?*
4. *Are your local hospitals and clinics offering routine in-person visits and surgeries (i.e., well child visits, dental cleanings, elective surgeries and procedures)?*

**Using those questions, Messiah Lutheran is not ready to resume in-person worship.** In Alabama, the number of Covid-19 cases continues to rise, and we do not have the ability to test non-symptomatic people who are not high risk.

**Though we are not ready to transition to resume in-person worship, we are preparing for that time.** The Church Council is preparing to appoint a Task Force that will study the requirements for responsibly resuming in-person worship. The Task Force in cooperation with the Council, will use SE Synod guidelines, CDC guidelines, and regulations for the state of Alabama to carefully plan how we can begin to gather in person again.

**The Council wants to prepare everyone that when we next gather for worship it will not immediately be the same as it was before the pandemic struck. To quote the synod document again:**

*The recommendations for congregations to implement a phased strategy to safely gather together again is not a return to pre-pandemic normal. Until there is a cure or vaccine to this virus, we are attempting to help guide your congregation in determining safe ways to continue ministry remotely or in person as the situation dictates.*

**We know this is disappointing news.** We are all anxious to resume the worship of our Lord together in the sanctuary and greet one another in person. The Council's overriding concern in this decision is the health and welfare of our church members and guests. As a mature church, we have a significant portion of our Congregation in the *high-risk* category for complications from the COVID -19 virus. It is out of concern for all that will proceed cautiously to re-open the building for activities. As Bishop Kevin Strickland stated in a recent letter to all congregations the SE Synod, "*We all grieve this decision, but the health and welfare of all of our members are of the utmost importance.*"

**Please be patient. We will continue to update you using email and bulletin notices as the Task Force forms and makes recommendations.** We all pray for an end to this virus and the many types of suffering it has caused. We appreciate your understanding, or at least tolerance, of this delay. Like you, we long to be able to worship in-person again and return to some normalcy serving together in the ministries and missions our Lord has entrusted to us.

**May God bless and guide us all,**

*Officers of Messiah Lutheran Church*  
Pastor Scott Peterson, President  
Steve Leeper, Vice-President,  
Laurie Campbell, Secretary  
Rhonda Gaede, Treasurer