



Tuesday, May 5, 2020

Beloved St. John's community,

It's hard to believe that it's only been seven weeks since we've been able to gather physically together in our beloved building. During this time, the number of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. has grown from about 6,000 to more than one million; and in Minnesota, from just 14 to over 7,000. Given these sobering realities, it's important to remember why we are choosing to stay away from our building: because right now, that's what love looks like.

We hope you have engaged in [some of the many new ways](#) we are doing life and faith together. Please take [this survey](#) to help us continue to refine and adapt what and how we offer spiritual connections while we stay physically apart.

So when will we be able to gather in the building again?

Based on continued guidance from our Governor, the [CDC](#) (Centers for Disease Control) and [MDH](#) (Minnesota Department of Health), our Bishop Brian N. Prior recently outlined several phases for re-opening our buildings. These might change based on new information, but for now, here is what we know:

Phase I: Stay at home: No Activities in the Building at All (this is where we are now).

Phase I.5: Stay at Home, but Allow Staff to Livestream or Record Worship From the Building

We are developing protocols and policies for how to keep staff, ministers and the daycare safe when this happens.

Phase II: "Soft Opening": Returning to building while continuing mitigation

When: After there has been a 14-day decline in sustained cases in Minnesota

What it looks like:

- Small groups and services only, while maintaining appropriate physical distancing
- Cleaning measures put in place

Phase III: Return to the Building Without the Need for Significant Mitigation

When: Once a vaccine, testing and tracing are sufficiently available

What it looks like:

- Gatherings and services in increasing numbers
- Continuing to offer online worship for the most vulnerable
- Physical distancing needs removed

It's very difficult to predict when this "Phase III" will occur, but it's likely not to be for many months. Waiting is a tremendous sacrifice on our part, but it is necessary to save the lives of our most vulnerable members and neighbors.

How To Understand this Spiritually

Our Bishop-elect Craig Loya has said that we should see this time as an "invitation by the Holy Spirit to transformation." He has also said that our vocation as followers of the Way of Jesus has always involved sacrificial, self-giving love—now more than ever. Although we need to grieve the loss of not being able to see

each other physically or worship in our usual ways, we can also rejoice, trust, and innovate, because our identity is not based on being able to be at St. John's. Most deeply, we are invited to see ourselves as followers of Jesus' Way of Love. We truly are living the next chapter of an ancient story, and our spiritual ancestors have left guidance for us in our scriptures and prayer book. Our primary focus can be not COVID-19, but what our loving, liberating God can do with and through us in the midst of COVID-19.

We will be learning, together, what this looks like. In the meantime, I encourage you to participate regularly and whole-heartedly in the [offerings that are currently available](#), even as we experiment with what else is needed.

I have no doubt that the Way of Love is needed more now in this world than ever. There is no better time to be St. John's, which has a history of innovation, learning, and courage. We can follow Jesus – with God's help – and trust the Holy Spirit to lead us toward love and life.

Faithfully,

[Lisa](#)

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