

April 26, 2020

Messiah Family,



Messiah's Ministry Council met Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> to begin discussion of how and when Messiah might return to worship in the building. I refer you to Bishop Maas' letter included in this newsletter for an excellent overview of what goes into such a plan. It was agreed that we would not return to worship until the end of May at the earliest.

On Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, Governor Ricketts announced that churches could gather for worship, funerals, and weddings beginning May 4<sup>th</sup>. He also said that all social distancing and safety protocols need to be in place during those gatherings. He also promised further guidelines would be coming before May 4<sup>th</sup>. Since the Governor's announcement, Bishop Maas made another statement:

While Governor Ricketts' announcement today revises his office's timeline for resuming public worship, Nebraska Synod congregations are urged to hold off until May 17 at the earliest, the Governor's initial recommendation. While as a matter of religious freedom it may be appropriate to lift restrictions sooner than that, as a matter of prudence and concern for the neighbor, it is unwise and potentially dangerous to do so. Some congregations may need to wait even longer. Whenever congregations decide to resume public worship, it is critical to follow all of the guidelines provided by the CDC and other reliable sources for preparing for and conducting that worship. Our calling is to continue with precautions toward "flattening the curve" and saving lives. As always, please be in contact with me or with your Assistant to the Bishop if you have questions.  
Sincerely yours in Christ,  
Brian D Maas,  
Bishop

Based on our discussion and the Bishop's advice, the Ministry Council will meet May 14<sup>th</sup> to consider again a date for returning to worship. The earliest date would be May 24<sup>th</sup>. We are especially concerned about how we handle gatherings in excess of our determined capacity, large number of at risk individuals who may want to attend, and how to "enforce" social distancing practices. Another factor in our consideration is that we are hosting a blood drive May 17<sup>th</sup>, our regularly scheduled drive. In order to follow American Red Cross' safety protocols, it was deemed impossible to hold the drive and have worship.

I leave you with Bishop Maas' words:

By the time we begin to gather together again in person, we will all have endured a cost—some of us, a very high cost—of time, energy, lost income, lost opportunity, even the death of loved ones. *Let us not waste the cost we've paid by rushing too quickly or acting too carelessly in our eagerness to find a sense of normalcy.*

In Christ's peace,

Pastor Greg