**St. Andrew Lutheran Church**

7420 FM 2673

## Canyon Lake, TX. 78133

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 June 3, 2020

Dear St. Andrew members,

People naturally ask why, in these pandemic times, churches have seemed to be more cautious than other groups or gatherings. Here are a few reasons: 1) caring for people is at the heart of what we do, and habits are hard to break; 2) church is the biggest group of people most of you are packed together with in a small space on a regular basis; and 3) they don’t have to have your funeral if they miscalculate; we do!

This letter is about inviting people back into services in the sanctuary in a safe and orderly way. Let me say a few things right off the bat: Like anything else in life, just because you are invited doesn’t mean you should come. Think about that carefully, please. The **online services** will continue to be offered and we will strive for excellent worship opportunities there, and the outdoor, **drive-in service at 8 a.m**. is an option many people might like if they give it a try. Those options are no less worship.

And a big caveat: if you are one of those people who is only interested in “things again as they were,” I am afraid I have bad news for you. Even if a service is at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary, it isn’t going to be what it was before. Even if it is eventually much the same, I hope we will have learned some things. It would be best if everyone tried to shift in their minds to think of this as a time for creativity and newness. The other option is just to be disappointed. I am confident that God is ready to help us see things in new ways, as always, and once we do, God has exciting things in store for us.

Moving back into an enclosed, indoor space is the most difficult step in the process. We have grown a little in our understanding of the disease. More than anything else, crowds gathered indoors really seem to be the key to the spread, and to controlling it. So here are the key steps that will allow us to begin gathering over the next four weeks:

* two neighborhood groups at a time will be invited each week (see below for schedule).
* participants will enter and leave without touching anything, and will sit in designated locations (marked by bulletins set out for you)
* masks will be worn, except by a few people when speaking, and while taking communion for those who do.
* There will not be congregational singing, or touching of any kind.

So, it will be wonderful to be together again, and it will be strange. We will cultivate some new habits. If you want to sing or don’t want to wear a mask, come at 8 and sing as loud as you want in your car, or sing along with the online service at home.

These four services will be essentially the same – a “homecoming” service. We might even think of it as one service spread over 4 weeks to include all who choose to come. These four will be special, and will take seriously what it feels like to be “back” after having been “away.” They will be different from the online and 8 a.m. drive-in services, which will follow our usual pattern and change each week.

Now the schedule. Look on your envelope – you should have a letter designation, A-H, of which neighborhood group you are in. We had to divide you up somehow, and getting to know the people in your neighborhoods seemed like a helpful side benefit. That letter should correspond to this list:

* *June 14: Groups E and H* (E: Cranes Mill, Oblate, Overhill / H: Hidden Fawn, Tom Creek, Scenic Hills, Westhaven)
* *June 21: Groups F and G* (F: Canyon Bend, Campbell, Charter Oak / G: Island View, Triple Peak, Sattler)
* *June 28: Groups C and D* (C: New Braunfels, Vintage Oaks, Copper Ridge / D: Spring Branch, Bulverde)
* *July 5: Groups A and B* (A: Northside, FM 306 / B: Purgatory, River Rd., FM 306, River Chase)

A last note – if you know you are in one of the vulnerable groups that shouldn’t be venturing out in a gathering like this, but desire to have communion again, could you reach out to me directly? An email to pastorpaul@gvtc.com would be great, or a call. This next phase will include offering communion to everyone we reasonably can, including, at some point, the outdoor service.

I suppose I could write something about what comes next, but why? Even what is written here is tentative. Blessings to you as you continue on this adventure with God we call life!

Pastor Paul