



FIRST CUTLERVILLE

Christian Reformed Church

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

5.21.20

Consider the heart. When working properly in tandem with the lungs, the heart provides the body with oxygen and nutrients for life. God made the heart to draw oxygen-depleted blood cells *back* in order that they can be replenished and *sent out*. This heart image seems an important one as we consider church. We are drawn in to be fed and we are sent out to enliven. A heart that ceases to draw in and send out cannot keep the body alive. As Christ followers, we are gathered and sent. The Heidelberg Catechism names these characteristics as crucial to being the *holy, universal church*. As we make plans to physically gather together again, we want to do so in a way that allows us to gather everyone in *and* send everyone out to the work of the Kingdom.

Our typical rhythm of gathering and sending at First Cutlerville has been quite different over the last ten weeks. We have primarily gathered in our own homes and then been sent to our own homes. *That's quite different* – especially when we consider the heart. If we try to picture a map where the location of First Cutlerville is the heart and our weekly attendance is how we, like blood cells are gathered to be fed and replenished and then sent out again. We have deeply missed that rhythm for all sorts of reasons. For many of us, this new rhythm has been anything but easy.

God tells us in His Word that the Spirit does the gathering and sending wherever we are. And while we *know this* in our heads and maybe even feel it in our hearts, we appreciate the healthy rhythm of physically gathering to worship. We miss worshiping together. We miss drinking coffee together. We miss hearing voices sing around us. We miss seeing kids run out for children's worship. We miss seeing the faces of the people we are blessing. Christians all of the world have expressed missing this rhythm. We join them.

Over the last few weeks as staff and leaders, we have explored a variety of options for how to be gathered and sent in healthy ways, with these as are our guiding principles.

We pray constantly for the wisdom, peace, and discernment of the Holy Spirit.

We remember that we are members of One Body.

We work concurrently with sister congregations as we pursue on-site worship.

We seek the guidance of governing and health authorities as we pursue *when and how* to gather.

As we receive letters, hear prayers, listen to encouragement, discern feedback, and engage with fellow church leaders, certain options became more fitting for our congregation. Some options were proposed, explored, and left on the cutting room floor for various reasons. For example, some congregations have gathered in small house churches. Other congregations, in an effort to promote awareness of fellow congregation members, use a live Zoom-meeting format.

As knowledge related to Covid-19 increases, we believe that the safest way, allowing for the maximum number of people to attend, is an outdoor worship service.

In working concurrently with other church leaders, we note that congregations have taken different approaches to communicating their plans. Our desire is to *remain principled enough* so we can work and worship together with clear purpose and vision, as well as *nimble enough* to shift plans and trajectories in this quickly changing world. For this reason, communication has been less about lengthy, multifaceted plans, and more about expressing the thought process behind our work.

Having said that, here are our next steps:

On Sunday, May 31, Pastor Ken VanWyk will lead and preach at our 9:30am worship service.

The worship service will be conducted with only musicians, singers, and worship participants on-site; the congregation will worship from their residences. The service will be broadcast live on our church website, Facebook page, and YouTube channel. Since this is our first attempt at Live Streaming in this platform, if there is an issue with the Live Stream feed, we will be recording the service to post as a video when complete.

Sunday, June 7, worship will be an outdoor service at 9:30am in our parking lot. Participants are encouraged to engage in the following ways,

- 1) with one's own lawn chairs on the grass/pavement in designated areas (family units sitting six feet apart);
- 2) from one's car with windows down listening to lawn speakers;
- 3) from one's car through an FM transmitter;
- 4) from home via live-streamed service.

We believe that worshipping in this way will allow us to gather as holistically as possible, with the fewest causes for health concerns. We will continue to worship in this way unless there are significant changes to guidelines or planning. If there is a thunderstorm or weather prohibits this form of worshipping, cancellations will be posted on WOODTV8 and WZZM13 and the service will be Live Streaming on our church website, Facebook page, and YouTube channel.

While more detailed procedures will be sent next week regarding upcoming worship services,

- Communion was originally scheduled for Sunday, May 31; it is now planned as part of our Sunday, June 7 outdoor worship service. Members are encouraged to bring their own bread and juice.
- Bring your own lawn chair, coffee, snacks, children's activities, and Bibles
- Seating areas will be designated to reflect social distancing guidelines
- Offerings will continue to be received via mail or on-line as alternative options are being considered
- Please strongly consider bringing a mask for traveling among others
- Restroom use will be limited to one person at a time (or a parent and child), with cleaning monitored (masks are strongly encouraged for those using indoor facilities)

Finally, and perhaps most important, in 1 John 4, Jesus' disciple John writes the following, "if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." **We have a unique and powerful opportunity to express the living love of God through our words and actions.** Each of us brings an opinion, position, platform, and approach to a worship service.

- Let's be quick to listen and slow to speak.
- Let's pray that God's living love in us provides the strength and humility to set aside our own agendas to consider others.
- We may be ready to hug, others may not – let's ask.
- We may prefer to remain home, others to attend – let's not judge.
- We may be extremely cautious, while others may have no reservations – let's empathize.

We are all one body – what an amazing opportunity to show the world that God lives in us and that His Love is alive in us!

~Administrative Elders

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