

Beloved Saints at Zion,

The good apostle, holy Paul, writes the following words in Romans, chapter 5:

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Paul is a good friend in times of suffering. He suffered much, in both body and soul. Yet even more, He knew Jesus Christ, who suffered for the sins of the whole world. In Him, the risen Lord, we have our source of patience and hope in trying times.

And so, beloved saints, **rejoice and leap for joy (Luke 6:23)**, for God has brought us to this very time and place. The COVID-19 virus has completely changed our manner of living here in Wisconsin, and it will change the life of Zion, too. Yet these changes are an opportunity for the Spirit to strengthen our character and renew us in the hope of Christ:

- 1) **All public liturgies at Zion are closed until further notice. Also, all fellowship groups, education, and Bible studies are suspended.** Our obligation to observe the state's ban on all gatherings of 10 or more people, designed to lower infection, has made these changes necessary.
- 2) **Zion will continue broadcasting at 9 AM on Sundays.** It will *not* be a service open to the public, but we *will* broadcast. You may listen live at WSAU 550 AM (or 99.9 FM and 95.1 FM), or go online to www.wsau.com and click "Listen Now." We are so blessed that our forbearers established this long-standing program, and I have confirmed with WSAU that it will continue.
- 3) **Your pastors intend to send you a weekly pastoral message in the mail.** This message will provide encouragement and a booklet to help you lead daily devotion at home. Also, if you would like to be part of an "**email tree**" for **Zion members**, please send an email to zion@zionlutheranwausau.com. We will use this tree to communicate news more promptly.
- 4) **Daily videos and live-streamed events will be posted to Zion's Facebook page.** Videos will also be posted to our website, www.zionlutheranwausau.com. These videos will include Bible study, worship, music, and other messages.
- 5) **Your pastors are available to visit your home with Holy Communion.** You may call us to set up an appointment. Please understand that our availability will be affected by other demands and any guidelines or bans imposed by local, state, and federal governments.
- 6) **We are establishing a Care Team.** If you are available to assist older or ill members with getting groceries, going to the doctor, or light chores, or if you are available for baby-sitting for younger families during this time, please contact the church office (715-848-7286 or zion@zionlutheranwausau.com) and give your name, contact information, and how you'd be willing to help.

7) **Pastors will visit the ill and infirmed.** Hospitals and some elder care facilities are not allowing us to visit unless the situation is dire. However, we are here to visit you as we are able. In addition to contacting pastors at the church, you may use our emergency numbers: 715-776-0201 (Pinzl), 651-783-2401 (Johnson), 715-845-1551 (Gjerde).

8) **Funerals held through Zion will most likely be graveside services for the foreseeable future.** Again, the ban on gatherings of 10 people or more in a single room makes this approach the best way for families to gather with the Word of God when a loved one dies. **Baptisms and weddings may be held at Zion, as long as the number of people in attendance is under 10.** Please call the church office to make arrangements. Being born anew through water and the Holy Spirit is essential for entering the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

9) **We may celebrate Holy Week and Easter late.** After this troubled time, we will need to sing “alleluia” at Easter! If the present restrictions last past April 12, please know that we may hold Easter at Zion when the current bans are lifted and our society is healthy again.

10) **Other events, such as the Spring Rummage Sale, organ concerts, Men’s Prayer Breakfast, and bread and pie baking, are also cancelled.** Please contact the church office with questions.

Enclosed with this letter is the first booklet to equip you with the Word of God in your home for this next week. It contains an outline of the liturgy that we will broadcast on Sunday; a brief order of home devotion; readings for each day of the week; and daily prayers.

Finally, please continue to love your neighbors, tend to the health of your home, and support your congregation, ministers, and support staff through prayer, goodwill, and financial offerings. At this present time, our church office remains open 8-5, M-F. We are dedicated to continue serving you in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is still risen from the dead, victorious over sin, death, and the devil! His birth in our human flesh and His willingness to suffer on our behalf demonstrate His sympathy for you and the rest of His people. He is still at work, and so we are, too. **Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7); rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4); love one another as He has loved you (John 15:12);** and know, each day, that **nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).**

The peace of Christ be with you!

The Rev. Dr. Steven K. Gjerde
Senior Pastor