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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ of Trinity Lutheran,
Grace to you, and peace, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As most of us are aware, last evening, the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned the State's "Safer at Home" order to fight the coronavirus. You might be wondering about if or how this ruling impacts our ministry serving Jesus Christ at Trinity; especially our return to using our building.

As we look forward in our shared life at Trinity, it is a good thing for us to look back to the start of our response to the coronavirus. I am truly amazed by and thankful for the response of Trinity's leadership in helping us move into this new normal for how we are being the church.

Our decisions to close our building to all but the most necessary purposes, and to move almost every part of our ministry away from 612 N. Water St., were not taken lightly. Our actions have been guided by deep prayer, and the shared wisdom and the gifts of leadership provided by members of Trinity. Also having helped shape our response is solid guidance from a number of sources, including: The President's Task Force, the Governor's 'Safe at Home' and Badger Bounce Back plans, the Center for Disease Control, the Wisconsin Department of Health, the Monroe County Health Department, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the La Crosse Area Synod, and the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and others.

Even more important to what has shaped our response is rooted in scripture, and our understanding of what it means to be followers of Jesus looked at through the lens of being Lutheran. On April 26, a number of the Pastoral Leaders of the La Crosse Area Synod, wrote a letter, of which I am a signer. In this letter, we have laid out what has guided and continues to guide our actions:

"WE BELIEVE Christ is with us, even when we are apart.

We know that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39). We long to return to in person worship in our congregations. We know that worship is an important spiritual support for many and a source of socialization and interaction for many who are lonely. At the same time, we want to keep people safe. Being apart from one another does not mean we are alone.

WE BELIEVE God gives the gifts of medicine and science for our wellbeing.

Wisdom is a gift of God; wise and trained scientists who have spent their lives studying viral infections and pandemics speak with one voice in saying COVID-19 remains a threat.

There have been tragic consequences when churches have ignored the recommendations of the CDC, state health departments and experts in epidemiology.

We thank God for the wisdom that guides scientists, doctors and public health professionals as they guide us toward the health and wellbeing of our nation.

WE BELIEVE The call of the gospel always includes care for the vulnerable.

As Christians, we limit our freedoms for the sake of others. Some limits, like the commandments, are given to us by God; some limits are given by the government. Both are given in order to benefit our neighbors. Motivated by love, Christians often go beyond what is required by law. Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism that the commandment *You shall not kill*, “is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so.”¹ In this time of pandemic, we are not necessarily called to push our practices to the extent of what is allowable under the law. Instead, we believe that we are called to model practices by which our neighbor is protected, and our parishioners kept safe. . .

WE BELIEVE The Holy Spirit equips believers for such a time as this.

The church is not the building, it is the people. Throughout history, believers have, at times, absented themselves from the gathering of the community of faith due to health, weather, persecution, work, or disability. Today we keep ourselves from gathering out of love. Christians now turn to the practices we have been trained in since our baptism - practices of prayer and scripture reading, as well as technology-enabled practices such as virtual worship and conversation with fellow believers to sustain us in this difficult time.”

It seems as though we are making head way; 5 out of the 6 criteria that the State of Wisconsin had set for moving from Safe at Home to the bounce back have been met. But the sobering reality of this virus is that it is not going away. Any actions that we as a congregation take to return to the use of our building must be taken with concern for the health of all members of Trinity.

The leadership of Trinity is hard at work; praying, studying, and beginning to plan for the return to the use of the building. You might notice that I didn't say 're-open' the church. That is because, sisters and brothers, Trinity has never closed! We are being the church, our call to serve Christ, to worship God, to care for all continues!

I ask that you continue to pray; for our community, for our community of faith, our leadership, and for each other as we continue to live into our vision statement:

God's Love, our hearts; God's Work, our hands.

In the love of Jesus Christ,
Pastor Mark Kvale
Les Stanley

¹ Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 412.