



May 26, 2020

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in the Minnesota North District-LCMS:

***“Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen”*** (Galatians 1:3-5).

This past Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Governor Walz issued a new Executive Order (EO 20-62) allowing churches to hold in-person Worship Services starting tomorrow (May 27<sup>th</sup>), provided they follow health guidelines (cf. Rev. Lee’s Letter) and limit the Services to 25% capacity.

This decision came about through discussion with faith-based leaders and following our announcement to reopen churches by Pentecost Sunday. The Governor’s office reached out on Wednesday evening and meetings took place on Thursday and Friday. We are grateful the Governor responded to our announcement, entered into dialogue with us, and as a result has now recognized that there are safe, cooperative and responsible ways to resume in-person Worship Services and care for the spiritual needs of God’s people.

Although congregations may now hold in-person Worship Services, I strongly encourage you to:

1. Not rush into this. Thoroughly evaluate the potential risks. Take your time. Look at what is happening in and around your community. Things could flare up and we may see new surges of cases.
2. Follow the Health Guidelines and Protocols. Part of the reopening plan requires safety protocols and a guidance document issued by the State (attached). These protocols are quite similar to the protocols we had previously proposed to the Governor but are not identical. I have asked Rev. Jeff Lee ([jeffrey.lee@mnnlcms.org](mailto:jeffrey.lee@mnnlcms.org) or 218-829-1781) to serve as contact person here at the District Office to assist congregations in working through these protocols for their individual situations.
3. Contact your insurance carrier to check on potential liability and for any safety documents they might have for congregations holding in-person Worship Services.
4. Offer other options to hear the Word for those who should not attend due to health conditions or age.

5. Be prepared for adverse reactions if you do decide to hold in-person Services. Sadly, there are probably more than a few people who would like the Church to look bad.
6. Please let the District Office know what your plan is as you move forward.
7. Pray fervently for an end to this pandemic, for guidance as we seek to make decisions for the good of God's people and out of love for the well-being of our neighbor.

The Gospel Reading yesterday in the 3-year lectionary series, John 17:20-23, hit home to me after a very difficult week. As you can imagine, there have been a wide spectrum of reactions to the decision President Woodford and I along with WELS and ELS Leaders and the Roman Catholic Conference made. Some communications we received were very supportive, others expressed disappointment, and a few were extremely upset.

The devil always seeks to divide us in all areas of life. He especially wants to create schism and unrest in the Church. That is why Jesus prayed His high priestly prayer in John 17. Do not let Satan cause division over this. Be in the Word, pray, discuss, evaluate, deliberate, and look to Christ the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

Please contact me if you have questions, concerns, suggestions, or if you just want to talk. I thank God for each of you and consider it a privilege to serve with you in His kingdom.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Serving our Living and Loving Lord with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Don Fondow". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Rev. Don Fondow  
President  
Minnesota North District-LCMS

***"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me." ~ (John 17:20-23)***