

## August 2020 Pastoral Message

Dearest Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my beloved family, and friends! I cannot believe it is already August, can you? These past months have been a long time for so many of us, including myself. But I am certain that times will be better sooner than later, this COVID virus will be sustained, and we can return to some kind of normalcy in our worship lives and in our faith communities.

Our Parish has been worshipping outside for weeks now in the shade at our respective churches, either in the parking lot, in the backyard, or under the comfort of trees. And thankfully the weather has cooperated for these engagements. We have also shared in the Lord's Supper with one another, albeit it is certainly different than how we regularly celebrate it...but we have celebrated it none the less. And for those who have not been attending for fear of getting sick or having mobility issues, I have made a concerted effort to reach out to you and visit you in your homes or have a meal with you. Lawn chairs have been the norm, but that is about to change.

I have a great announcement that I am pleased to share with you: as of August 2<sup>nd</sup>, we will indeed be back in our church sanctuaries. The Parish Council has voted, and we will return to our regularly scheduled worship times on that Sunday. But there will be some significant changes involved though. Masks for everyone in attendance will continue to be the norm, and physical distancing will be a must. There is also the question of singing. For the first few weeks, we will not be using our hymnals. Maybe there will be organ or piano music to accompany the worship service, but I want to keep the possibility of aerosol from our raised voices – even through masks – at a bare minimum.

Now on Holy Communion Sundays, I will continue to wash my hands and sanitize them with disinfectant prior to putting on gloves to offer you the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. I will keep myself as clean as I can, and ask you to please do the same. This will most likely be going on for a while, as the virus continues to spread. However, I believe we will get through this together as one – as the Body of Christ into which we were baptized.

So much has changed in our lives over the last months, but one thing that has not is the love that the Triune God provides for us. Do not lose faith because we have been away for so long – we are getting back together and for some that means our spiritual lives will be reenergized. These months may have set us back as a worshipping community; but I am certain that when we will come back together even stronger as one Parish. That is one of my greatest hopes and prayers.

I look forward to worshipping with you, or seeing you, again real soon and pray for you often. May the peace of Christ be in your hearts. God bless you all.

Take care dear ones and stay healthy,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish