



## **WORSHIP AT ALL SAINTS**

Continued Online Gatherings and a “Phased Reopening”  
Summer 2020

Dear Friends in Christ:

The color green marks this long liturgical season after Pentecost, a color meant to evoke thriving life in the Body of Christ. All of us, I know, are eager to participate in that liveliness together, by gathering in person in the sanctuary of our church building. This past week, the Diocese of Western Michigan issued some guidelines for congregations who choose to reopen their physical spaces for worship, beginning in July, and the All Saints Vestry met on Saturday, June 20, to consider prayerfully a range of options in that regard.

In brief, we decided to help ensure the physical safety of the most vulnerable among us by continuing our current practice of online worship, at least through the month of July. This will give us time to prepare adequately to meet diocesan guidelines and we will also be able to assess the effects in Michigan of the phased reopening of business and other public spaces. In addition, we agreed to open the sanctuary for individuals who wish to pray there on their own (a schedule and procedures will be developed). I want to offer here some of the background and rationale for these decisions (the full text of the resolution passed by the vestry is included below).

As your rector, I am responsible for the overall pastoral care of the parish. At this present moment, two foundational aspects of that care are in tension with each other: facilitating occasions for spiritual flourishing (especially Eucharistic celebrations) and ensuring your safety, especially the safety of those who are the most vulnerable among us. Personally, I ache for opportunities to gather together for Eucharist, which resides at the center of my Christian faith and spiritual practice. I am also keenly aware of the risks to everyone’s bodily health if we were to meet in that way right now.

I am also committed to forms of collaborative leadership, and I have been relying on the insightful input offered from your two wardens, Bobbie Gaunt and Margie Mason, as well as the pastoral sensibilities and experience of Jim Steen. Consulting with them led us to call a special meeting of the whole vestry to consider how we might respond to current conditions and our shared longing to resume meeting together for prayer and worship. The factors we considered in this special meeting include the following:

- We are still learning how this new virus behaves and about the kind of disease it causes (which can be much more severe than even the worst case of the flu, especially for people over 60 and/or those with other, underlying health issues).
- It now appears that close proximity to infected individuals (some of whom can be without any symptoms) is the most common means of spreading the virus.
- Some of the key characteristics of how we worship together, alas, are some of the riskiest for transmitting the virus and are not permitted by the recently revised parameters from the diocese: singing together, reciting texts together (such as the creed or the Lord's Prayer), and sharing food together.
- There has been an alarming increase in coronavirus infections in the cities and states that have recently started to reopen businesses and public gathering spaces.

These and other factors led us rather quickly to conclude that we need more time to assess the risks involved in reopening our building for public worship and to plan adequately for the greatest level of safety for everyone when we gather again. All of us also expressed a deep desire to reconnect with the physical sanctuary at All Saints for prayer, and we agreed to initiate a process that would allow individuals to pray inside the building beginning in *July* (within certain parameters and limits).

The Vestry thus passed the following resolution unanimously:

**"Resolved, that All Saints Church will continue its current practice of online and prerecorded worship services for Sunday morning until at least the end of July 2020; the Vestry will continue to make preparations for a possible phased reopening, if appropriate, in August; a schedule and procedure will be developed for individuals to use the sanctuary for prayer."**

As we continue to live with these realities, let us realize in ever greater ways and reassure each other that the church is not closed, even if we cannot meet together in the physical sanctuary. The church is currently open for "business"—caring for each other, praying, learning, and seeking avenues for Gospel service in the world.

Please know that I am keeping all of you daily in my prayers and that I am eagerly anticipating being there in Saugatuck by the end of July.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



**The Rev. Jay E. Johnson, PhD**  
*Rector*