|  |
| --- |
| **PHASE 1**  **No gatherings of any kind supported by Trinity. Worship is online only.**  *This is similar to how we conducted ourselves at the start of the pandemic, prior to beginning drive-in worship service.* |
| **PHASE 2**  **Small, physically-distanced gatherings only (i.e. council meetings and individual pastoral support). No sharing of food/drinks. Worship is both online and, weather permitting, drive-in. Communion style is modified for safety.**  *This is how we have conducted ourselves throughout the summer.* |
| **PHASE 3**  **Worship is both online and in our building. In-building worship services and other gatherings such as Bible study and Confirmation are practiced with strict guidelines in place such as physical distancing. No sharing of food/drinks; no fellowship hour. Communion style is modified for safety. Congregation will not sing during worship. Worshippers will be escorted to and from designated pews and encouraged not to linger in the building before or after worship.**  *This is how we will be conducting ourselves beginning October 4th. (Confirmation resumes indoors according to safety guidelines beginning Sept. 13th.)* |
| **PHASE 4**  **Worship and other gatherings are as close to “normal” as they will probably become for several years. While we will still maintain a close eye on health and safety practices, we will begin to once again have fellowship hour, potlucks, etc. and hold worship without the requirement of physical distancing. Communion practices will be “back to normal.” Singing will resume.**  *We anticipate moving into this phase once a vaccine or remarkable therapeutic for COVID-19 becomes widely available in our community. Other markers indicating moving into Phase 4 may be: ENCC resumes indoor public visitation, one month goes by with 5 or fewer new cases of COVID-19 in Hamlin County, and our schools are operating with few or no special safety restrictions in place.* |

***In a nutshell, what will I do on Sunday mornings starting October 4th, if I choose to worship in our building?***

1. I pray : )
2. I make sure everyone in my family or extended family is together outside. We might put on our masks. Then, we enter the building together through the NORTH door only, maintaining 6 feet of distance from other families.
3. An usher will make a note of who is in our party, so as to track attendance.
4. If my kids are attending Sunday School, they should sanitize their hands and then proceed to the Sunday School area by 9:45. I should wait on the “sidelines” to be seated until non-Sunday School families are seated, so that Sunday School families are seated in the back of the sanctuary. This makes it safer for kids to enter the sanctuary after the sermon without passing other families.

1. At the rear of the sanctuary, there will be a table with an offering plate, hand sanitizer, and individually-packaged communion elements (1st and 3rd Sundays). I drop my offering into the plate, sanitize my hands and those of my children, and take the number of communion cups my family needs.
2. I wait for an usher to escort me to a pew.

1. After the worship service ends, I wait for an usher to escort me from my seat. I leave the building as soon as possible through the NORTH door only, maintaining 6 feet of distance from other families at all times.

1. I keep on praying : )

***See reverse for Trinity’s phased safety guidelines.***

Dear Siblings in Christ,

This is a difficult time in our congregation. It is a challenging and even frustrating time.

…It is also a joyful time!

Why do I say this? Because God is with us! And soon, we will have the opportunity to worship in our sanctuary once again. This is something to celebrate!

At the same time, I urge everyone to exercise caution. Please, do not view our return to in-building worship as a reason to discontinue or become lax in the vital safety protocols we have been diligent about implementing in our lives.

If you feel that it is safest for yourself or your family to continue to worship online only, please do so. As your pastor, I do not want you to feel as though your non-attendance at in-person worship is necessarily a poor reflection on your faith life. On the contrary, it could be that your non-attendance is a reflection that your faith is strong enough to worship from home and trust God to care for you, spiritually and in other ways, during this time of pandemic. I will only know that, though, if you let me know. So…

If you are worshipping with us online, it is very helpful for me when you place a comment such as “Good morning” or “Worshipping from home” in the comments box on Facebook. Or, simply tell me (as many of you already have) that you are regularly worshipping from home. That way, I know you are still with us. We absolutely do not want anyone to become lost within our faith community just because you are unable to safely worship in the building.

When you are worshipping online, please do just that: worship! Please, do not treat it as a podcast or lecture. This is an online form of worship, but it invites participation. Sing, say the liturgy, pray, and be mentally and spiritually present to God.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

When you do feel God leading you to join us for in-person worship, please take note of the phased system of reopening enclosed with this letter. **Trinity is planning to move into “Phase 3” beginning in October.**

**In Phase 3, as our council has determined is best, you can expect the following safety protocols to be in place at Trinity. These are absolute expectations for all persons in our building for worship services:**

1. Everyone will maintain at least 6’ from non-family members at all times, whether indoors or outdoors.

1. There will be no fellowship hour or sharing of food or drinks.
2. We will all use hand sanitizer upon entering and exiting the sanctuary.
3. Masks are recommended. They are not required.\*
4. We will not sing together at any time. (Singing causes saliva to potentially project far beyond 6 feet).
5. Worshippers will be escorted to and from pews by ushers. Those who arrive first will sit in the 2nd pew from the front, and so on back. Those who are seated at the rear of the sanctuary, will be the first to leave. Therefore, we will not choose our own pews. *If you would like to sit with extended family, we ask that you wait outside the building for your entire party to arrive, so that you may be seated together by an usher at the same time.*
6. DO NOT ATTEND in-person worship whatsoever if you are aware that you have or may have a contagious illness, or if someone in your household has a contagious illness to which you may have been exposed.
7. We will “share the peace” through a friendly wave.
8. Pastor will remain at the front of the sanctuary. Pastor will not shake hands.
9. Ushers will track attendance at all services. If we are notified that a worshipper has later tested positive for COVID-19, we will then be able to contact those who were present in the worship service.

These guidelines are in place so that the church building can continue to be a place of sanctuary and spiritual refuge. Far too many times in the past six months, outbreaks of COVID-19 and even deaths associated with these outbreaks have been traced back to worship services, choir practices, and church gatherings where safety protocols were not being practiced. We do not want that!

**At any time, Trinity’s council may determine that it is best to move back into an earlier “phase” of reopening before moving forward into phase 4. This may be due to significant community spread of COVID-19 in Hamlin county, closure of our schools due to the pandemic, etc. Should this occur, we will notify you via facebook, website, and robocall as soon as possible.**

If you have a special concern or question related to these guidelines, please contact Pastor Bev or a member of our church council.

I look forward to joining with many of you soon for worship in our beautiful sanctuary. Thank you for your continued faithfulness. I pray for you daily.

God’s peace,

Pastor Bev

\*Masks will be required to be worn by everyone over age 2 on Sunday, November 1st, which is the date of our 125th anniversary worship service. It is also All Saints Sunday. Bishop Hagmaier will be with us this day, to preach and celebrate our anniversary with us. The requirement of masks is a Synod stipulation for all of Bishop’s church visits.