



The Church of Hope

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Janet Chandler, Pastor

June 25, 2020

Dear Friends,

It has been quite a while since you all have received information on the status of the Church of Hope since the quarantine started in March. It has been a time of learning about a pandemic virus as well as how to livestream worship on Facebook, even sideways! It has been an interesting time to figure out how to reach out into the community as a church, the body of Christ, and how to be more creative in how we do worship on Sunday. We have had virtual communion and a lot of worshippers enjoy sitting with their cup of coffee in their pj's and watch the service from the comfort of home. Or they hold off watching the service on Sunday and watch during the week. I always kid about the ability to re-watch my sermons. Well, it's getting to the time of figuring out when we can finally open our doors for worship.

The state has just gone into phase 4 of reopening and so far the numbers of cases of coronavirus is going down which is a good thing, but this could change as the number of cases can be on the rise if the guidelines are not followed. We are keeping our eye on what is happening in the world around us and trying to figure out when it would be a good time to once again open the building for worship.

The Session met last Tuesday, June 16th and have decided that we would focus our hopes of opening the building on August 2, 2020. This is only if the virus is under control and/or a vaccine has been found. We will continue to monitor the situation and determine if this is the best time to open. This is not an easy decision for them as the number one focus is for the health and safety of the congregation. Due to the age of those who attend worship, it is important to keep following the guidelines faithfully and completely as we do not want anyone to contract covid-19.

Churches offer an opportunity for the virus to spread as there is close contact, singing and responsive readings, the passing of the peace, offering plates, and a whole lot of hugging. In the past few weeks, there have been stories of churches meeting and spreading the virus in churches. Maybe the passing of the peace has even more meaning. Knowing this information, we have to be extra careful in how we worship and keep the building disinfected. We are starting to take steps in order to open the doors as soon as possible.

In order to once again worship in the building, we have to take the following steps:

1. Deep clean and sanitize the church building. We are presently having this done so the building will be ready to open when the time comes.
2. Masks are required. We are asking everyone to wear a mask and if you forget or do not have a mask, we will have them available.

3. We will take temperatures. We now have a new thermometer to do this.
4. If you do not feel well, please do not come to worship in the building.
5. We ask that you enter by the main entrance and there will be an usher to make sure you get in safely.
6. We will have hand sanitizer in the entry and ask that you use it before you come into the sanctuary.
7. The offering plate will also be in the entry so you can put your tithe in there. We will not be passing the plate.
8. When you enter the sanctuary, we will have the pews marked for social-distancing. Families can sit together, otherwise we will have the pews marked for seating.
9. We are asking that when you do come into the sanctuary, to please find your seat and keep social-distancing in mind.
10. The hymnals and Bibles will not be in the pew racks. We will not be having congregational singing but we will have instrumental music instead.
11. We will be using paper bulletins with the scripture readings for you to use.
12. When the service is over, we ask that you exit with social-distancing in mind.
13. You may want to use the hand-sanitizer before you leave the building. We will have the doors propped open so you do not have to touch the handle.

This all sounds pretty overwhelming and it seems like it's pretty harsh, but it is important for us all to work together in keeping you all and the building safe from catching this terrible virus. For those who do not want to come back into the building, we will continue to livestream the service on Facebook. I will also continue to send the sermon to those who are homebound.

There is probably a question about receiving Communion. We do it virtually on Facebook and will figure out a way to administer this sacrament in the service. It will definitely not be intinction!

We are asking that you all continue to make your pledge or donations to the church as we do have financial obligations to be met. You can send your pledge to the Church of Hope, P.O. Box 248, Gardner, IL 60424, or leave your envelope in the mailbox outside the back door of the church. We also have a website, gardnerchurchofhope@sbcglobal.net.

If we all work together, we can once again open our doors, but church is not just in the building as we have found out these past few months. The worship service will be a lot different and that is okay as we find new and different ways to praise God and gather as the body of Christ. It is with spirit and love that we continue to be a congregation and hold each other up in prayer as we continue to make this journey together.

I can't tell you how much I miss seeing you all in person and spending time with you all on Sunday morning. I really do appreciate your "attendance" on Facebook, which, by the way, is reaching out to people all over the place! I hear that many of you are entertained by my menagerie of Grace (the dog), Fatty Catty, Daniel, and Gemma.

As I have said, we are focusing on the first Sunday in August, but if there are any changes, we will let you know.

Blessings and Love,