



# St. Lawrence

## Episcopal Church

### **Journeying Together Into the New Normal**

August 3, 2020

Dear Parishioners of St. Lawrence -

We go to church to be inspired, but that inspiration comes from a wide variety of sources. For some of us it is the liturgy, for others the Eucharist, homily, music, or prayers. For still others it is our personal presence together with our church family in a familiar space on a Sunday morning. All of us miss the "normal" church services we have become accustomed to, that many of us grew up with. We miss the handshakes and hugs and the coffee and the conversation. What are friends and family for, if not to share these things? Mourning these losses is completely understandable and appropriate.

In March, we closed the building in response to rapidly increasing numbers of Covid-19 cases, and in doing so we were following Illinois State and Diocesan guidelines. These are more ambiguous times. Parts of the economy are reopening. At the same time, the number of Covid-19 cases are rising once again. In some areas of the country, this rise is truly alarming. Which cues do we follow? Planning is always based on an understanding of what the future will be like, but in this case we really don't know what September will bring, much less how conditions will be later in the year or early next year.

After the shutdown, we established a process to consider issues surrounding reopening for in-person worship, and to discern if, when and how to do that, taking into account State and Diocesan requirements, the recommendations of health authorities, and also the specifics of St. Lawrence's situation. A Task Force was established to examine these issues and make a recommendation to the Wardens and Vestry. The members of the Task Force are Susie Brock, Susan Fink, Chris Heier, Tom Simpson, and Hal Toberman. We are very grateful that they are willing to work on this important task.

In the case of most retail businesses, closing the doors means closing the business, which leads to layoffs, debt, and eventually the end of the business and even bankruptcy. A church is different. While it takes money to run a church, a church is not a business. Our goal is not to generate profit by serving customers, but as Christians our goal is to care for each other - our church family - and for the larger community around us.

In light of these factors, and in the absence of an available vaccine, the Task Force has recommended, and the Wardens and Vestry have agreed, that we should continue to keep our building closed for in-person worship. Joy Rogers has also participated in these discussions as our spiritual advisor. We do not know at this time how long our fast from in-person worship will last. At this point, we expect the closure to last at least through the end of calendar year 2020. The Task Force will continue to work, and to monitor conditions, and we will make adjustments as circumstances warrant.

We're all in this together, as one community, one church family. We are being deliberately cautious because that is what we feel we should be at this time. As we move forward, we need to do so together as a family, caring for our most vulnerable members. The very reason we miss each other is the reason why we need to be cautious and careful - because we do care for one another and for our larger community. For right now we need to pray and be patient.

We know that this time after how-it-used-to-be can be disorienting. That is why our values of community are so important at this time. Much like Lent, this time can be an opportunity for both personal spiritual growth and enriching our community life together through new means to worship and stay connected. We are having to work together to invent new ways of "being church" as we journey together into our "new normal" - this is both a challenge and an opportunity.

As we start our program year in September, many of our regular activities will return in virtual form. Our Rector Search Committee continues their important work. Our new Antiracism Task Force will be getting started, and there will be opportunities to learn and talk together about this important topic. We will also be exploring and experimenting with new ways to worship and to stay connected both for spiritual growth and also just for fun. There are various small groups we can stay involved with, including our HOPE feeding ministry - we'll be highlighting these in the weeks to come so you can consider participating.

We cannot be together in person yet, but we will never be apart. We believe that we will emerge from these times as a stronger, more vibrant community, because of our efforts to stay connected and care for one another. We are St. Lawrence, a family strong together in Christ.

Wardens: Jacki Dioguardi  
Kate Todd

Vestry: Luisa Benson  
Karen Broms  
Carolyn Finch  
Kip Gasper  
Tom Gracia  
Ellen Jennings  
Tom Simpson  
Cindy Smith  
Elise Womack

Task Force: Susie Brock  
Susan Fink  
Chris Heier  
Tom Simpson  
Hal Toberman, Deacon

The Very Rev. Joy Rogers

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