

To: Members and Friends of St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

From: Board of Elders

Date: April 1, 2020

Re: Update on Coronavirus Actions

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We know that these past few weeks have been a trying time for each of us individually, for us as a nation, and also us as a congregation. Like many of you, we have been staying informed on the latest guidance and mandates from the government and other sources. And also like you, we've been trying to adapt as best as we can. We believe that meeting together around the Word and Sacraments is always vital to our lives here on earth, but even more so during times of crisis when the comfort of the Gospel and the reminder that God is in control of all things and uses them for our good as He has promised (even if we can't see how at the moment) is needed. And we know that having disruptions in our normal church routine has raised questions and concerns, so we wanted to write to you all to give you the context of our discussions and to spell out our current policy (based on the guidance and mandates that have been received to date).

We have been meeting regularly with Pastor (often several times a week via video calls, but also regularly via email and texts) to review the current situation and make plans for each upcoming worship service. During the timeframe in which the risk of exposure to the coronavirus remained low, and the guidelines from the governor of Virginia allowed for public gatherings of up to 50 people, the relatively small size of our congregation allowed us to make the decision to continue live, in-person worship services (with online live streaming as an additional option) for several weeks longer than most churches we know of in the area and outside the state. And we worked with Pastor to set up the deployed churches so that those who could not, or chose not to, attend the in-person services could still receive the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. Last week and this week have brought additional mandated restrictions from Governor Northam that prohibited gatherings of more than 10 people. Even with the lessened attendance in recent weeks, we were still averaging over 20 worshipers each Sunday. So while it was a difficult decision to make, we felt that it was prudent and necessary to go to online live streaming as our only means of holding worship services at this time. But we also recognized the value and peace that some degree of familiarity could bring to this new means of worship. So with Pastor's willingness to do so, we made the decision to continue live streaming the Sunday divine service from our church home in Vienna. As you know, even under normal circumstances, our Sunday services are only made possible by the help offered by members and friends filling a variety of roles such as worship assistants, accompanists and those who help with set up and tear down. Therefore, in order to provide live streaming from our regular church home, we made the decision that we would only allow those individuals that faithfully provide assistance in one or more of the following roles to attend the live streaming service in person (and by so limiting, we still comply with Governor Northam's executive orders):

- Participant (e.g., Pastor, worship assistant, accompanist)
- Live streaming technical support (e.g., microphone and video setup and monitoring)
- Setup and teardown (e.g., altar guild, physical setup of items such as the baptismal font)

We know that many of you desire to continue to worship at our Vienna home, and we truly wish we could accommodate all of you, but under the current governmental restrictions limiting the size of public gatherings (including explicitly referencing worship services), we did not think we could comply with those requirements and still do so. And again, the reason we implemented the deployed churches was so that everyone who wanted to still could have a (smaller) in-person service with the Lord's Supper. We recognize these may not be ideal circumstances, but these aren't ideal times.

Holy Week and Easter are the exceptions to the above rule. We and Pastor wanted desperately to allow everyone who desires the opportunity to worship in-person for Holy Week and Easter. Understanding that we don't know what new regulations will be implemented between now and then, our current plan under the current regulations is to offer 2 or 3 services (depending on desire) on Easter for groups no larger than 10 (including Pastor, accompanist and assistant). And we also wanted everyone to have a chance to attend a Holy Week service (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday). So we are implementing a sign-up for these services. We thought this would be the fairest approach. Unless there is additional space available after everyone has made a choice, we are limiting attendance to one Holy Week service and one Easter service.

To summarize and reiterate, at this time, St. Athanasius services will be online only, with in-person attendance limited to those essential to providing those services as discussed above (and contacted directly by Pastor or by a member of the Board of Elders) and for Holy Week and Easter services as outlined above.

While Pastor has been vital in our discussions and in helping to shape our approach, ultimately the decision rested with the Board of Elders, so if you have any questions regarding anything in the above, please reach out to either or both of us rather than Pastor (but please, if you have pastoral needs or other needs as Pastor reiterates in his announcements, reach out to any of us).

We appreciate the patience and understanding of all of you as we navigate these waters. And more importantly, we thank you for your forgiveness when we inevitably make mistakes.

Sincerely,

Jay and Scott