June 2, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

My greetings to you all in these pandemic days. I first want to thank all of you who have been working so hard to keep our Christ the Lord community thriving. We have never been “closed.” In many ways, we have been more open than ever before! We’ve created liturgies to meet our on-line needs, we’ve streamed, zoomed, made phone calls, emailed, delivered fabric to Kathy for masks and gowns, gotten landscape work done, and we are still developing new ways to engage.

I also know that after nine weeks of this ‘shelter in place’, many of us are hungry to be worshiping together again. We can remember so tangibly how good that felt – and we’re ready to have it back!

There is much talk about beginning in-person worship in our sanctuaries. We have guidelines issued by Governor Newsom for congregations to resume services, and we have guidelines issued by our diocese. Here are the links:

https://diocal.org/covid-19-advisories

The Episcopal Diocese of California is in no hurry to open the doors of its churches, and for one simple reason: safety. From a theological perspective, it is all about love:

“Jesus said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. (Luke 10:27)

Our gospel mandate is to love each other, and we will only begin opening our physical doors when we believe that we have created the environment and the protocols that maximize the safety of all who choose to come. Bishop Marc has said that we will not resume in-person worship before Sunday, June 28th, and very possibly not even then.
Our services will be different, there is no doubt about that. And we all will grieve those things that will not be possible. I have faith, however, in the vibrancy and warmth of our congregation that we will be able to make compensations and still feel that unique Christ the Lord welcome whenever we are together. If we can do it ‘virtually’ I do believe we can do it with the worship changes that have to be.

When we resume in-person worship, there will be a number of restrictions. There will be much sanitizing and disinfecting. Individuals and family groups will all maintain as much physical spacing as possible (at least 6 feet). We will all wear masks. There will be no congregational singing (a ‘super-spreading’ activity). There will be no touching, and there will be minimal moving around. Our Eucharist will continue to be ocular and spiritual, ‘by heart and with thanksgiving.’ We will create a live-streamed video of our service for those who will need to remain sheltered-in-place.

The Bishop has asked each congregation to create a Regathering Team. Please let me or Ann Roberts know if you would like to be part of this team which will consider the many issues of regathering and how best to manage them for the community and our outside groups. We will share our plan for Regathering when it is created, and we will ask for your support in carrying it out.

When all the congregations of the Diocese of California have worked out how they can safely welcome people back into their sanctuaries, then, unless we’re ‘sheltering in place’ again, Bishop Marc will give us permission to begin regathering.

I also add that I am always available for pastoral conversations in a variety of forms, and weather permitting, a possible outside visit with precautions in place. I realize that besides the issues and concerns of the pandemic, our country is coming to grips with its past history of injustice for people of color. I urge you to speak up and participate as you feel called to do, but in the safest way possible. For those intimately affected in any way my heart goes out to you. I ask that you keep prayers for peace and justice as part of your daily routine.

Remember we are not a building, or an exclusive club, we are the church, the followers of Jesus. I give thanks for you all, and especially for your warmth, generosity, and patience.

Very Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams†