

Dear Council,

My report tonight is more in the form of a letter. I am writing this way **because of my gratitude** for all that you, our committees and teams, staff members, and congregation members have done during these past nine months of pandemic. I cannot adequately express the blessings from God that are flowing through this faith community we call Messiah. We may not notice it during the flow of these coronavirus days, but they are real and are positively impacting our congregation and community.

Our worship staff have been working extremely hard to prepare special services and special music for Thanksgiving, during the days Advent, and during the week of Christmas. Recently changed state guidelines have forced some adaptation to the plan, but these special recordings will be amazing and will be publicized and available on our website and through Facebook. Watch for announcements in Constant Contact for when special services and music will be available.

We officially welcome this month Pastor Susan Kirlin-Hackett as our new Pastor of Care and Welcome. Pastor Susan is extremely gifted in the art of being a pastor, and she has a great deal of wisdom to share with the staff, church leadership, and the congregation as a whole. It is a pleasure to welcome her to Messiah as a co-conspirator with me to work to bring excellent pastoral ministry to the congregation. She has a great sense of humor, deep insight, and a kindness that will bring many blessings to Messiah. Welcome, Pastor Susan!

Even though in-person worship is still a way off, we have been brainstorming as staff as to what it might take to do so both safely and continue livestreaming when people are present. Here are some highlights of our conversation:

- Tia will move upstairs and direct the practical and technical production of worship from the organ loft.
- The proposal for enhancement to worship livestreaming has been funded by the Endowment Committee. This allows for upgrades to our WiFi network, permanently mounted cameras, and upgraded hardware and software to produce and stream worship. We will also be upgraded our broadband service.
- A part of this proposal also allows for the purchase of iPads and a dedicated computer to download and distribute worship and special music for those who do not have internet connection. The Care Team Ministry (and Pastor Susan) will begin discussing how to implement this amazing gift.
- If we begin in-person worship before the pandemic is over, we must determine how to choose who gets to worship. Will we be able to implement a hospitable reservation system? What other options are there?

- If we begin in-person worship on Sundays before the pandemic ends, there will need to be a congregation member staffed Covid-19 Team. They will need to be thoroughly trained, committed, able to supervise and guide entry into the building and sanctuary, monitor behavior and enforce rules and guidelines, and supervise and guide exit from the building. They will also need to clean the sanctuary and gathering space before and after each use.
- We will need to increase our cleaning service hours.
- Our insurance company, Church Mutual, encourages that we have a Covid-19 waiver completed for each person returning to the building for any worship service or other gathering during the pandemic. How do we feel about that? How would we implement and track?
- There can be no congregational singing. Masks, fully covering the face, will need to be worn by everyone in the in-person worship.
- Who will run the hospitality/reservation system? Staff should not be in charge of this system.
- We will need new signs and hospitable messaging in the building.
- When would we branch out to allowing small groups in the building. What is the criteria for beginning this practice? How would we train and utilize a Covid-19 leader for each small group?
- Staff, by law, can say “no” to any task/activity they feel threatens their health and a Re-opening Team needs to be formed outside of staff to handle the logistics of a transition to this new practice. Most staff have already-assigned duties on Sunday morning.

During our staff retreat, Jan led a great devotion based on the book *Carry On, Warrior: The Power of Embracing Your Messy, Beautiful Life*, by Glennon Doyle. As a staff, we shared our summary of what we heard, and we have used it to help guide our days during this time of pandemic. Staff Wisdom (or what we **can** do during this time):

- We can spend time living in uncertainty and fear
- We can spend time living in trust of God and expressing love for others
- We can name that for which we are grateful daily
- We can choose **not** to focus on the “What If” Monster
- We can choose **not** to live by expecting the worst
- We can spend time living as if each day is an amazing, unwarranted gift to us