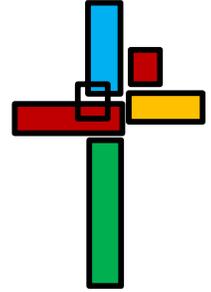


Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
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September 28, 2020

Greetings Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We would like to thank all of you, our congregation, for your support during these challenging times. With the start of fall, our third season of living within the pandemic and the movement into Phase 3 of BC's *Restart* Program, it is essential that we provide a safe environment for employees as well as all congregation members and visitors to our church. We must also be mindful that the guidelines and safety precautions of Phase 2 continue to be in place.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a new reality for each of us. As we live into that new world, we have had to make adjustments so we may keep our neighbours safe, as well as ourselves. Our church is no different. Since the onset of the world pandemic, faith institutions have been shown to be high-risk spaces for Covid-19 transmission. And it is with that in mind that our Covid-19 Leadership Team response details have been developed and adopted by Church Council, ever mindful of the need to *avoid the 4 C's: closed spaces, crowded places, close-contact settings, and continuous time.*

Yes, this means there are changes within the church building and in our practices. Our priority is to to protect you, our employees, our congregation and contribute to community efforts to limit the spread of Covid-19.

It is within those parameters that the *OSLC COVID-19 'Restart' Response - Your Quick Guide* has been written. You will find this guide attached. Please help us to ensure a safe place for all. We can only accomplish this if we all do our part in a spirit of cooperation.

For those wishing to read more, *Our Saviour's Lutheran Church COVID-19 'Restart' Safety Protocol*, will be posted to our church website. All the documents take into account the directives from the Government of British Columbia, our BC Public Health Authority Centre for Disease Control, BC Provincial Medical Health Officer, WorkSafe BC, and the BC Synod to keep everyone safe during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a *Living Document*. The plan will be continually updated as new directives are issued from any of these bodies. Additionally, the document *OSLC WorkSafe BC COVID-19 Safety Plan for Employees* will be posted to our website.

Recently Church Council passed several motions specific to the pandemic. The first two motions were:

- **That the document OSLC COVID-19 'Restart' Response - Your Quick Guide be communicated to congregational members, posted on our website, and also inside and outside our facility. (September 8-20)**

This is a requirement of WorkSafe BC and demonstrates that we have in place Covid-19 safety practices.

- **That there not be a return to worshipping in-person, at this time.**

As we have done since the beginning of the pandemic, this will be regularly reviewed at subsequent Church Council meetings.

Out of concern for health and safety, Church Council at this time cannot recommend a return to in-person worship within the sanctuary. We have a 'duty of care' and value the health and safety of our employees and each member of our congregation, as well as our role as a church within our larger community in the prevention of the transmission of Covid-19.

Beginning at the end of August and in subsequent briefings, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Health Minister Dix and Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister of Health voiced that as we enter into fall with currently rising positive cases, we must be deliberate and disciplined to not let Covid-19 in. Their most recent recommendations are that we "must make personal sacrifice now", consider what is essential, return to the social bubble limits of Phase 2, keep elders and seniors safe, and employers are asked to be flexible and examine how employees may stay home to work.

Worshipping within a sanctuary is considered a high risk activity for the transmission of Covid-19. Congregations within Canada who have complied with all provincial regulations have had cluster outbreaks. Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, reminds us as she described a church outbreak, "that coming together risks more than sharing fellowship; it also risks sharing the Covid-19 virus, despite all precautions being taken."

OSLC currently has a congregation with approximately 100 active members within these demographic groups:

- Under 20 years of age: 10%
- 20 to 40 years of age: 10%
- 40 to 65 years of age: 20%
- 65 to 95 years of age: 60%

The majority of our congregational members are seniors who fall into an age group that the BC CDC clearly states is at a significantly higher risk should they contact Covid-19. Risk factors include those: *Age 65 and older are at a significantly higher risk of serious complications should they contact Covid-19. The % increases in proportion to age. With underlying or compromised medical conditions. Within households where someone is undergoing treatment for cancer or are immune compromised.*

Currently, worshipping on-line with communion through live-streaming provides our congregation with a means to come together as the Body of Christ and worship in a safe manner. Through this venue we are also reaching out to and engaging the broader community in being with us as siblings in Christ, living out God's word.

Church Council also passed the following motions which relate to Covid-19:

- **Prior to taking part in any activity/event at OSLC, each person must complete and sign the *Release, Waiver of Liability, and Assumption of Risk Agreement, Relating to COVID-19.* (September 08-20)**

This waiver has been prepared for us through our BC Synod, under the directive of legal counsel, and subsequently has been reviewed by church council.

- **Out of concern for health and safety, and our 'duty of care' as a congregation that a letter be sent out indicating that user groups continue to be curtailed for the time being. (September 08-20)**

Historically, congregation members have come and gone from our church at their leisure. Some trips were intentional, other trips provided for the opportunity to drop in and simply say hello. We know the opportunity to physically come together, to share fellowship, to share stories, to simply catch up, to support each other through good times and bad, and to be in the presence of others is missed. Unfortunately, it is these very social elements that pose great risk for transmission of Covid-19.

In today's world, physical interactions have been replaced with worshipping on-line; *Zoom* coffee, *Zoom* discussions, *Zoom* meetings; phone calls; 3-minute Reflections online; FaceBook, You Tube, and OSLC website postings; and emails as well as church mail outs. These changes, so different from our past, continue to provide us a means to connect as a congregation and to know we are siblings in Christ, coming together to share His word and live out His mission. Though things may look different and some of our practices have changed, our faith remains constant.

We thank you for your faithfulness during these uncertain times. Through this time of struggle and strife, like the Israelites during the Exodus, we yearn for the comfort of what we had, and yet we can take heart in knowing we are not alone as He will sustain us through the journey.

Sincerely with the Grace of God,

Heather Empey
OSLC Council Chairperson

Robin Dielissen
OSLC COVID-19 Leadership Team Chairperson
OSLC Council