

A Letter to the Communion of the Saints at Pease CRC

May, 20, 2020

Many of you have been asking good questions about how things are going at church. We hear that you miss it and we miss you too! We know that there are many people who believe it's time to start gathering again, and at the same time we also know there are many of you who believe the time for that has not yet come. We wanted to give you a glimpse into where we are at as a church as we navigate the shifting waters of our response to COVID-19. In an effort to do that, we thought it good to provide you with some answers to the most commonly asked questions we've been hearing from all of you.

1. How are you doing?

So many of you have asked how my family and I, and the rest of the church staff, are doing. Thank you for your care and concern. We are all doing well. Like most families with children the challenges of working and doing school from home exist for us as well. The kids (and Jessica) have now finished their school years and are looking forward to summer. Our oldest two both have been blessed with full-time work for the summer. Jessica and I are also thankful to have been able to continue working right now. Thank you for continued prayers, support, and words of encouragement to me personally, and also to the whole team at church. They mean a great deal to us all.

2. When will we be able to come back to church?

This (or some variation of it) is, by far, the most commonly asked question we are receiving here at church right now – and for good reason. The question, and the sentiment behind it, speaks volumes about the significant role that our faith communities play in our lives. I take these questions and the underlying sentiments that cause people to ask them to be a good thing.

The short answer to that question is this, “We simply do not know.” The administrative team meets on a regular basis (via ZOOM) to discuss the latest information that is coming from state elected and health officials and we are using their guidelines and recommendations to inform our response as we consider how and when to proceed with corporate worship gatherings. Pease CRC has intentionally not discussed nor published a long-term plan because the situation changes too quickly. Instead, we have been taking an ‘every few weeks’ approach to our decision-making. We consider this to be the wisest and most effective way to proceed at this time.

If and when we start hearing that groups of up to 100 or more can gather in one place at one time, we will begin some conversations about gathering for corporate worship. This means it may well be into the summer or even the fall before we are gathering again, and even then, it will likely be with some limitations in place (i.e. social distancing, mask wearing, no offering plate passing, etc.).

3. I've heard of some churches doing drive-in or outdoor services, couldn't we try that?

While we appreciate the sentiment behind these efforts, the leadership of Pease CRC does not believe that doing something like this would be a good option for us. First, we are simply too big and our parking lot is too small. Most churches doing this kind of thing are smaller congregations and have parking lots that can easily accommodate their needs. If you've ever arrived at Pease at 9:25 on a Sunday morning you know how small our parking lot gets! Second, the temptation to get out of our vehicles and socialize with friends is simply too great. Third, we continue to provide our radio ministry on WQPM (1300AM and 107.5FM). Our ability to provide that broadcast service requires that those leading worship do so in the sanctuary because we need access to the sound and broadcast equipment there. Therefore, having a worship service in a different place (i.e. outdoors) is not as easy as it might sound.

Instead, we have opted to do a few "Drive-Thru Blessings" events on Saturday mornings. This has allowed people to come to the church building and see a few familiar and friendly faces during a longer time frame as opposed to having everyone arriving and leaving at a set time. Though not perfect, we will continue to think creatively about how to plan and implement events like that along with using electronic gatherings like ZOOM coffees and livestreaming of worship services.

4. Are the church facilities available for rental/usage during this time?

We are taking requests for church facility usage on a case-by-case basis. Again, we are going to rely heavily on recommendations and guidelines that come from places like MN Department of Health and the CDC. We will also take into consideration the individual or entity making the request, the type and size of the event in question, and whether or not it is reasonable to believe that all current safety guidelines in effect could be adhered to for the event.

5. Who will make these decisions?

As mentioned above, the Administrative Team is meeting on a regular basis and they, along with the Council, will have the final say on any decisions regarding gathering for worship and/or plans for facility usage. We are also in communication with our insurance provider on these matters and they have indicated that following state and local guidelines and recommendations is the best (and only) way to avoid any potential liability.

6. How is the church doing financially?

The short answer to this question is, "Pretty good." We applied for and did receive some government assistance through their Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) which has allowed us to continue to retain and pay all our employees. In addition, our total giving has remained relatively steady both month-to-month and compared to this period last year. Thank you for continuing to be faithful!

As a result of all this, we have been able to maintain all our regular general fund obligations including employee salaries and benefits, utilities, ministry related needs and services, and

classical and denominational commitments. However, we are still about \$25,000 behind where we need to be in order to be meeting our budget for the first four months of the year. Thankfully, through careful planning and your past and ongoing generosity and support the general fund has some cash reserves which has allowed us to bridge that budget gap in the short term.

7. What can I do to help during this time of separation?

Again, it is encouraging that so many have asked this question. Thank you! There are three things that I would ask every member of Pease Christian Reformed Church to do right now:

1. Pray. Please be in prayer for your church, its leaders, its members and families, and its staff. Pray for those who are affected by this virus – economically, physically, personally, professionally, emotionally, socially, spiritually. Prayer is the most effective tool we have at our disposal. Please pray.

2. Persevere. I know it's difficult to stay connected to your church community right now. It takes a special effort to gather yourself and your family around a radio or computer screen Sunday after Sunday. It's awkward to gather to sing all by yourselves. The technical glitches are sometimes frustrating and annoying. Connecting via screens is not ideal. It's an imperfect system. Thank you for being diligent and for doing your best in these challenging times. Please stick with it. We will continue to be here for you and for each other. Keep checking in on each other. Keeping sending those notes and cards. Keep making the phone calls and sending the texts and watching the videos and staying connected. Please persevere.

3. Be Patient. We all want this to be over and for life to return to 'normal'. Please be patient as we decide how best to proceed and know that we are doing our best to honor and respect everyone in the process. Please try to avoid becoming upset or angry when decisions are made that you may not agree with. We will move forward to being together again as quickly and as safely as we can, but doing so will likely take longer that you would like or may think is necessary. Please be patient.

It seems probable that the year 2020 – the year of the 125th anniversary of this congregation – will go down as one of the most unique in its long and blessed history. But it is only one year. Out of 125! I have no doubt that Jesus is using this time for the good of His church in Pease, reminding us yet again that this is His church, and we are His people, who are here for His glory. Thank you your support, encouragement, and grace!

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.” --Ephesians 3:20-21

In Service to the King,

Pastor Michael