

September 17, 2020

Dear St. Andrew's,

In a word to the church in April, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminded us that "as our seasons of life in the COVID-19 world continue to turn, we are called to continue to be creative, to risk, to love. We are called to ask, *What would unselfish, sacrificial love do?*" He answered, "Love is the community praying together, in ways old and new....Love calls us to care for our neighbors, for our enemies.... Love calls us to be gentle with ourselves, to forgive our own mistakes, to take seriously the Sabbath. Love calls us to be in love with God, to cultivate a loving relationship with God, to spend time with God, to be still and know that God is God."

"What would love do?" is the question that the vestry of St. Andrew's gathered last night to ask. Our county is experiencing a significant spike in new cases of Covid-19. With careful discernment, prayer, and much grief, we wrestled with how to respond to this rise in cases. Our response of love, out of care for the health and safety of each other and the wider Big Rapids community, is to suspend all in-person worship and gatherings until the rate of new cases goes back down, effective immediately.

The vestry voted to implement a new policy to help us determine at what point we re-open or suspend in-person gatherings. This is the policy:

- If the number of daily new cases per 100,000 people for Mecosta County exceeds 9, then all in-person worship and activities will be suspended and the building will be closed to all but essential business.
- Every two weeks, beginning on 9/28/2020, we will re-evaluate our status. We will re-open or suspend in-person services and activities as required per the above metric.

This does not mean that the church is closed. The church is open anytime and anywhere that the people of God are present and doing God's work in the world. St. Andrew's will hold a service of Morning or Evening Prayer on Zoom every Sunday while in-person services are suspended. The Manna Pantry will remain open, following social distancing and mask use precautions and utilizing curbside pickup, just as they have been doing throughout this pandemic. I, and your vestry, continue to be available to you by phone and online.

This Sunday, September 20, Evening Prayer will take place on Zoom at 7pm. Look for another email tomorrow with information for how to access the Zoom call. The Zoom call can be joined online from a computer or smartphone or by calling in from any phone. I will be happy to help you get connected.

I ask for your prayers for me and your vestry as we continue to navigate how to respond with love to the changing landscape of Covid-19. Thank you for continuing to be church with us and for helping us to respond as love would. I hope to see you on Zoom on Sunday evening.

In Christ,
Deacon Radha

The Rev. Radhajyoti Kaminski
Rector.cmec@gmail.com
352-272-8927