

WORSHIP SERVICE PROTOCOLS FOR THE REOPENING OF OUR CHURCHES

St. Matthew's Danube, St. John's Renville, St. Matthew Flora Twp. MN (WELS)

Dear Members of St. Matthew's Danube, St. John's Renville, and St. Matthew Flora Twp.

For more than two months we have suspended public worship services. Our buildings may have been empty, but God continued to fill us with his Word of peace as services were held online. While we are grateful for the technology available to us so that we could continue to hear the Word of God through the gift of radio, television, and the internet, God gives us a special gift in allowing us to gather together in person to worship Him. As state restrictions and federal recommendations have changed, we give thanks to God that we are planning a return to in-person worship services. With renewed thankfulness we join the Psalm writer in saying, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1).

We are planning for a return to public worship starting **Sunday, June 7**. To respect our government and to respect the lives God has entrusted to us, we will begin public worship under social distancing and sanitary protocols. Please take time to read through this following bullet points to see how worship services will be adjusted due to the current circumstance.

Making these plans was not an easy task, as this is all very different than what we are used to and would prefer to do. But these plans were established with an earnest desire to follow the principles the Lord gives in the 3rd, 4th and 5th Commandments. We keep in mind that God's command for us to gladly hear and learn his Word is a continual command given for our good (3rd Commandment). We also remember that he has told us to honor and obey those in authority unless they clearly tell us to go against his Word (4th Commandment). And, in all we do, we strive to demonstrate love for our neighbor and their physical well-being (5th Commandment). As we now give thanks to God for the opportunity to gather together again around the means of grace in mutual encouragement of one another, we are also called to respect those in authority who watch over us for our good and to be considerate of those around us. In love for God and neighbor we have put forth these guidelines that we pray will be for the benefit of the body.

Worship Services

- St. Matthew Flora Twp – 8:00am
- St. Matthew's Danube – 9:30am
- St. John's Renville – 11:00am
- NO Sunday School or Bible Class at this time

Considering others as we come together:

- Please attempt to come 10-15 minutes early to give time for proper seating arrangements and preparations for worship, especially with the new adjustments.
- Please practice social distancing and refrain from hand shaking and close contact with others.
- The entry/exit doors will be propped open to limit contact with the door handles.
- Please make use of the main entrance only.
- We ask that people who have been sick in the last 14 days or in contact with a sick person in the last 14 days to remain home and make use of the online services.
- We ask that those who are at higher risk of illness remain home and continue to make use of the online services. Remember you may also contact your pastor for a personal visit.
- Please read through additional health guidelines sent with this letter, posted on our website, and posted at the church. Be keenly aware of any symptoms that you may be experiencing and take appropriate action. Please err on the side of caution if you are unsure if you should come to church.
- Sit in the designated pews, leaving appropriate distance between you and the families in front of you and to the side of you. We recommend sitting in the middle of the pews or towards the outside aisle to leave plenty of room between you and the center aisle.
- Please sit towards the front to allow for others to fill in behind you.
- Masks are recommended. Some will be made available at the door.
- Please wash or sanitize your hands before coming into church. Hand sanitizer will be provided at the door.
- Additional cleaning of the church will take place in between services.
- Please refrain from entering the basement. The balcony will be reserved for the organist, the livestream operator, and overflow seating only if necessary.

What to expect at the church:

- Please find your seats as soon as you arrive for worship.
- Sit in the designated pews. Some pews may be roped off to assist with social distancing.

- Hymnals, Christian Worship Supplements, and Bibles will be removed from the pews.
- Ushers will not hand out bulletins. Bulletins will be laid out on a table. If you use one, please take it home with you. We will also use the worship slides projected in the front of the church.
- Please sit with members of your household only.
- Arrange yourself in the pews to be six feet away from members of different households.
- Please seat yourselves from front to back in the sanctuary and leave back to front.
- Offering plates will be located in the doorway to the sanctuary, please drop your offering in the basket before or after the worship service.
- After worship we recommend that you return to your vehicle. While we cherish our fellowship time, please understand that this needs to be limited at this time.

Worship Service

- We will follow a modified service that will be included in the worship slides.
- Due to heightened respiratory concerns we will limit our singing.
- Post service announcements will likely be eliminated on most Sundays. The full list of the announcements will be written in the bulletin, projected in the worship slides, and posted online.

Holy Communion practice:

- Communion will be held at the end of the service as the congregation is dismissed.
- Communion will be served to one household at a time.
- At the direction of the usher please depart the sanctuary, enter the narthex, and approach the designated tables.
- The bread and the wine will be placed on the table for you as you come forward.
- The bread will be in a small cup for you. Tip the cup with the bread into your hand for the communion wafer.
- Receive (eat and drink) the bread and wine at the pastor's direction.
- The pastor will speak a blessing and you and your family may depart in peace.

For those who are not comfortable attending worship at the church quite yet:

- We do encourage members 65 and older and those who have pre-existing health conditions to strongly consider your safety before coming to worship. Staying home may be the wisest course of action for you at this time.
- The 9:30am worship service from St. Matthew's Danube will be livestreamed on YouTube and posted on our website and our Facebook page as normal.
- Private communion and pastoral visits are available upon request. Contact Pastor Kuschel 320-522-2428
- Sermons, worship folders, devotionals, and other materials will be available on our website or can be emailed or mailed to you as well.
- Please contact pastor if you would like to be added to our weekly mailing list.
- Offerings can be dropped off at the church or mailed to the addresses below. We thank you for your continued support of the gospel ministry.

***St. Matthew Flora Twp.
36313 Kenwood Ave
Redwood Falls, MN 56283***

***St. John's Renville
209 Bryant Ave NE
PO Box 416
Renville, MN 56284***

***St. Matthew's Danube
PO Box 67
Danube, MN 56230***

We understand that not everyone will feel comfortable returning to worship immediately. For no reason should anyone feel pressured to attend or to stay away. The same is true for masks. While masks are very much recommended, they are not mandatory. We simply ask you to be considerate of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The guidelines that we have developed and the conclusions we have come to have not been easy. They have not been made lightly. Your leaders met with your pastor and we struggled with what would be the best practice for our particular congregations and we appreciate your patience. We also appreciate your consideration and courtesy in following these recommendations. This will be a temporary situation which allows us to demonstrate our commitment to our Lord and to each other. In this, we strive to honor the intent of Ephesians 4:1-3 which says, "I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. Live with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

God bless you and keep you safe! We pray that the Lord would bless us as we encourage one another in the faith, as we worship the LORD, and as we proclaim his holy name. Please contact your pastor or the members of your church council if you have any questions.

Serving you in Christ Jesus: *Pastor Mike Kuschel*

**This letter was written with much consultation from area pastors and leaders from the congregations of the Redwood Falls East Circuit of the Minnesota District of the WELS. We give thanks to God for the gift of Christian leaders who oversee the care of many souls in the name of Jesus Christ.*