

Open the Doors of Advent!

Dear Advent Family,

Perhaps it has felt like an eternity, but it was just eight weeks ago on March 11th that all services and activities here at Advent Lutheran Church & School were cancelled. In the midst of the affliction we have faced because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Word of the Lord yet rings loud and true:

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Let us pray.

Almighty God, heavenly Father, give us grace to trust You during this time of illness and distress. In mercy put an end to the pandemic that afflicts us. Grant relief to those who suffer, and comfort all who mourn and are downtrodden. Sustain all medical personnel in their labors, and cause Your people ever to serve You in righteousness and holiness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The best of news is not what was announced by Governor Holcomb on Friday, May 1st. The best of news is what Christ our Savior has done for you, nay, for the whole world! Through His incarnation into our flesh, His complete fulfillment of Holy Law, the Lamb of God hung in utter distress upon Calvary's tree, bearing all punishment and sin upon His sacrificial shoulders. He did this for you! Into death and the grave He descended, being raised for our justification. The best of news is His complete justification...for you...to be received by faith, covered in Holy Baptism, absolved through His life-giving Word and fed into your very mouths. Good news indeed.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as through something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:12-13

For the past eight weeks, His Word has continued to be preached and taught according to its truth and purity and His Sacraments have been rightly administered. Granted, here at Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church this has taken place over the internet and in private gatherings of individual households through Absolution & the Sacrament. O how we yearn for the opportunity to gather together again in our beloved sanctuary, receiving His gifts without restriction or encumbrance!

And should our Lord yet tarry in His return, that day, dear members will come.

By now, most of you have probably heard or read of Indiana's stages for reopening. While some of you might chafe at the restrictions from the State and Federal government to date, we do not believe that we as churches are being persecuted for our faith in doctrine and practice.

God's Holy word teaches us:

be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good
Titus 3:1

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

1 Peter 2:13-14

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love
Ephesians 4:2

Accordingly, Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church & School has thus far followed the recommendations and guidelines sent forth, by our Governor and Federal government.

And so, when we will be able to gather together again in our beloved sanctuary, receiving His gifts without restriction or encumbrance?

This may be the foremost question on our minds and hearts!

After careful consideration and consolation with the Pastors, the Board of Elders, our Chairman, as well as a sampling of current active and practicing physicians in our parish, we humbly submit the following plan for reopening our church doors. Please note that we cannot address all the many variables and details associated with reopening. Be smart! Use your best judgment! Details will be addressed further in the Q&A which follows. Here is an overview of our plan that has been mutually agreed upon:

Stage 1 (March 11th – May 9th)

- School and Church closed with only essential staff working
- Services and Bible Classes streamed online
- Absolution & the Sacrament available by appointment for individual households (under 10 persons at a time)

Stage 2 (May 10th – May 23rd)

- School remains closed
- Church Office reopens with normal hours of 8:00am-4:00pm
- Meetings and groups of less than 25 may reconvene
- Even though the State of Indiana is allowing churches to “reopen”, the restriction on social gatherings is limited to 25 (instead of 10). The spirit of the law is best understood as services such as “weddings, funerals and baptisms.” We read the following from the State of Indiana: *“Religious services may convene inside places of worship. There are specific practices that should be considered for in-person services that are driven by social distancing guidelines and protections for those 65 and older and individuals with known high-risk medical conditions. Examples of services include weddings, funerals, and baptisms.”*
https://backontrack.in.gov/files/BackOnTrack-IN_WhatsOpen-Closed-stage2.pdf
- It is not feasible nor advisable to therefore “reopen” our church doors just yet for the following reasons:
 - We would need at least 12 services on Sunday based on attendance
 - It would be difficult to clean and provide a safe environment
 - We are in the process of installing permanent cameras and equipment for continued “streaming” of services, which many will still need for the foreseeable future. Currently, we have wires, mics and cameras draped over pews and the floor which would be hazardous for worshippers.
- As such and for the time being, we will continue Stage 1 practice of streaming the Sunday Divine Service and offering Absolution & the Sacrament by appointment.

Stage 3 (May 24th- June 13th)

- As “social gatherings” will be increased to 100, we can safely and in good conscience provide an opportunity for members to gather once again for Sunday Divine Service! Signup for this service is required:
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090b4eadac29a4fb6-sunday>
- **Please bring with you: hand sanitizer and a few disinfectant wipes in Ziploc bag.** We are unable to provide these supplies for every member. Donations will be gladly accepted!
- We kindly ask you to also follow and practice social distancing. **Masks are allowed and encouraged to be worn, but please note that not all members will choose to do so.** If you are uncomfortable with this, please continue to “shelter-in-place” at home, watching the services online and/or making use of a scheduled time for Absolution & the Sacrament.
- Restrooms will remain open, but please use at your own risk. We will be unable to properly sanitize and clean during the services or even between the Sunday morning services. Rest assured, all areas will be sanitized and cleaned as normal during the week.

- **According to current State & CDC guidelines, consider not attending if:**
 - You are high risk and/or age 65 and older
 - If you have had a new cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, muscle pains, headache, sore throat, diarrhea, nausea or new loss of taste or smell within the last 14 days.
 - **Use your best judgment for your own health and that of your neighbor.** It is not sinful to continue “sheltering-in-place”, participating in the Divine Service from home via our streamed service and/or making use of the offered opportunities for Individual Absolution & the Sacrament as needed.
- Starting May 24th and for the next two Sundays (5/31 & 6/7), we will reopen our doors and offer a 45 minute Divine Service at the following times: 8:15am, 9:30am, 10:45am. **In order to attend one of the services, you will need to sign up online (link below), call the Pastors or the Church Office.**
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090b4eadac29a4fb6-sunday>
- There will be no Bible Class, Fellowship or Sunday School
- Social distancing measures will be in place with the following practices:
 - Enter the church no earlier than 10 minutes before the scheduled service
 - Church doors will be opened before, during and after each service
 - No congregating with others outside your household in the Narthex, Sanctuary or other parts of the Church
 - The Order of Service will be printed for you on a stand as you enter. There will be no hymnals, bibles, tracts or attendance books in the pews.
 - Offering Plates will also be set on stands for you to drop your contribution
 - **You may sit anywhere in the Sanctuary in the pews NOT marked with blue painter’s tape, maintaining at least 6’ separation from other parishioners. To clarify, open seating will look like a normal pew.** Households may sit together but need to maintain separation from other individuals and households. If you have questions about this or need assistance when seating, the Elders will be available to direct parishioners while maintaining social distancing guidelines.
 - For communion, an Usher or Elder will direct you and/or your household to come forward down the Center Aisle. Maintaining separation and moving towards the Chancel, you will await the Pastor’s invitation to come forward. After he has directed you forward, please come forward to either side of the Chancel, where a tray will be placed on a stand, containing our Lord’s Body and Blood. At the Pastor’s direction, you may eat and drink of our Lord’s precious Body and Blood. Please note that for the sake of social distancing and sanitary practices, we will not be using the Chalice or kneel at the Communion Rail for these three Sundays only.
 - After communing, please return to your pew location, dropping the glass individual cups in a bowl placed off the side aisle. Please do not let your children touch or play with this sanitizing solution.
 - After the Service has concluded, please wait patiently in the pew until directed by an Elder or Usher. During this time, using the disinfectant wipes you have

brought with you, please wipe down the pew where you have been sitting and any parts or items that you have touched.

- Once you are dismissed by an Usher or Elder, please depart immediately through Narthex. The Ushers and Elders will then proceed to clean and ready the sanctuary for the next service. Congregating after the Service in the Sanctuary, Narthex or other parts of the Church will be discouraged.

Stage 4 (June 14th- July 4th)

- As “social gatherings” will be increased to 250, we will resume our “normal” schedule of Sunday Divine Services at 8:15am & 10:45am with no signup required.
- Social distancing measures still encouraged
- There will be no Bible Class, Fellowship or Sunday School
- Offering plates still placed by the doors
- Hymnals and bibles placed back in pews for use
- Kneeling at the Communion Rail and offering of the Chalice returned to practice, as is Distribution by the Pastors.
- Individuals and households will still be asked to wipe down (disinfect) the hymnals, pews and any item they touched before departing Sanctuary.
- June 14th will be a grand and glorious service, barring any changes from the State regarding the Covid-19 pandemic!

Stage 5 (July 5th onward)

- Services continue as before
- Social distancing measures still encouraged!
- Bible Study & Fellowship in between services reconvenes!
- There will be no Sunday School for the rest of the summer (this could change)

Please be patient as we slowly “reopen” our doors, attempting to honor our authorities and protect our neighbor. For those still “sheltering-in-place” by choice or illness, we will continue to stream our services online as well as offer individual and household opportunities for Absolution & the Sacrament.

This is our current plan moving forward, which of course could change as needs or circumstances arise. Please use common sense and good judgment for you and/or your family!

Have no fear little flock!

*In Thine arms I rest me;
Foes who would molest me
Cannot reach me here.
Though the earth be shaking,
Ev'ry heart be quaking,
Jesus calms my fear.
Lightnings flash
And thunders crash;
Yet, though sin and hell assail me,
Jesus will not fail me.*

*Satan, I defy thee;
Death, I now decry thee;
Fear, I bid thee cease.
World, thou shalt not harm me
Nor thy threats alarm me
While I sing of peace.
God's great pow'r
Guards ev'ry hour;
Earth and all its depths adore Him,
Silent bow before Him.*

*Hence, all fear and sadness!
For the Lord of gladness,
Jesus, enters in.
Those who love the Father,
Though the storms may gather,
Still have peace within.
Yea, whate'er
I here must bear,
Thou art still my purest pleasure,
Jesus, priceless treasure!*

Lutheran Service Book #743 "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" Text: Public domain

Let us pray.

Almighty God, merciful Father, Your thoughts are not our thoughts, and Your ways are not our ways. In Your wisdom you have permitted this pandemic to befall us. Keep all of us from despair and do not let our faith fail us, but sustain and comfort us. Direct all efforts to attend the sick, console the bereaved, and protect the helpless. Deliver any who are still in danger, and bring hope and healing that we may find relief and restoration; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Peace be with you,

Pr. Mackay, Pr. Grady, Mr. Chuck Long (Chairman) & Mr. Steve Vogtman (Head Elder)

Questions and Answers

1. **When can I come back to church?**

The opportunity to come to church and receive Absolution & the Sacrament has been offered for you as an individual or household since the initial closure and will continue for the foreseeable future. You may signup online, call the Church Office or either of the Pastors to schedule a time to do so.

Starting Sunday May 24th, services of 100 or less will take place at **8:15am, 9:30am and 10:45am**. You will need to signup ahead of time here:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090b4eadac29a4fb6-sunday>

Beginning Sunday June 14th, we will resume our "normal" worship schedule of **8:15am and 10:45am** with no signup required.

2. **What can I expect when I come back to church on May 24th ?**

Please bring hand sanitizer and a few disinfectant wipes with you. Please do not enter the building prior to 10 minutes before the service. The doors will be open and an Elder/Usher will direct you immediately to the Sanctuary. Face masks and social distancing practices will be allowed and encouraged. Please pick up a printed order of service and as you desire, placing your offering in the collection plates on a stand. You may sit anywhere in the Sanctuary in the pews NOT marked with blue painter's tape, maintaining at least 6' separation from other parishioners. To clarify, open seating will look like a normal pew. Elders will be present to assist you if you have questions. There will be no hymnals or bibles in the pews, so feel free to bring your own for the singing of hymns. The Divine Service will be shortened slightly so that all may have the opportunity to worship. For communion, an Elder/Usher will dismiss you and/or your family to come down the center aisle, maintaining 6' separation between those in front and behind you. There will be a stand with a tray containing our Lord's Body and Blood placed on each side of the Baptismal Font. No kneeling at the rail will be allowed at this time. Only one individual and/or family should come forward at a time, at the direction of the Pastor. After the individual and/or family has communed, please wait until they depart down the side aisle to come forward, at the direction of the Pastor. At the conclusion of the service, an Elder/Usher will dismiss you. While waiting, please take a moment to wipe down the pew you have been sitting in and anything you have touched. Please depart the Sanctuary through the Narthex immediately. The Elders will then begin to clean and ready the sanctuary for the next service. Congregating in the Narthex or other parts of the Church will not be allowed at this time.

3. **Can I bring friends or other family members with me?**

Yes, but use your best judgment. For the services on May 24th, May 31st and June 7th, all those in attendance are required to sign up online. After June 14th, all may come as they are willing and able!

4. **Will there continue to be online services?**

Yes. We will continue offering weekly Services and Bible Studies via our website and our YouTube channel. Thanks to a few generous donations, new cameras and equipment are being installed in the Sanctuary, Library and Fellowship Hall. You may watch them online at www.adventlutheran.org or <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7WT2Fb-oxn7Fs7dfYgDuzw/featured> There will also continue to be a printed bulletin for you to download and follow/participate at home with your family.

5. Can I still communicate with the Pastors if I need Private Confession & Absolution, Counseling or help?

Yes, please!

Pr. Mackay's cell # (317) 847-7215
email mmackay@adventlutheran.org

Pr. Grady's cell # (317) 372-6289
email jgrady@adventlutheran.org

6. What if I need/desire communion and choose not to attend services just yet?

Our Pastors will continue to be available by appointment to give you Absolution and the Sacrament. Please do the following: use the online sign-up on our website, call the Church Office or call the Pastors directly.

7. What if I need help with bills, food and/or medicine?

Please call the Pastors, the Church Office, any of the Elders or a fellow Advent member. Please don't hesitate to let us know your needs. We are here to help!

8. Why are we slowly reopening instead of just immediately "returning to normal"?

For the good of our neighbor and in obedience to our civil authorities.

9. What about other activities? (Council, Board Meetings, Choir, etc)?

While most of these meetings have been taking place online or via conference call, we will slowly begin to have in-person meetings. Your Chairperson or Director will be in touch with you regarding these meetings. Call the Church Office if you need help setting up an online forum or conference call.

10. What about Ushers & Altar Guild?

We will resume using Ushers and Altar Guild starting June 14th.

11. What about Advent Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten?

Our School is closed for the remainder of the year.

12. Will the Nursery, Cry Room and Restrooms be open?

Yes, but please use according to your best judgment. We will attempt to clean during the week in advance and after Sunday services, but cannot guarantee complete cleanliness. Please use disinfectant wipes to clean any areas or items you have touched. Note also that others may be using these areas at the same time so social distancing is encouraged. Be smart!

13. What about Sunday School, fellowship and adult Bible study on Sunday mornings?

Fellowship and Bible Study will not resume until July 4th. Sunday School remains on Summer Break unless informed otherwise.

14. Where can I find more information on Covid-19 and the reopening of Indiana? Please use the CDC website as well as the Indiana Department of Health website.

CDC - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

ISDH - <https://www.in.gov/coronavirus/>

IN - <http://backontrack.in.gov/>

15. How do I make an offering to the church while activities and worship services are reopening?

- By Mail: Send check to:
Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church
11250 N. Michigan Rd.
Zionsville, IN 46077
- Enroll in Direct Deposit from your bank(s). Contact Juanita in the Church Office.
(317) 873-6318
- Use our Online giving platform, ShareFaith, through our website <https://secure.sharefaithgiving.com/go/form.php?rid=3ae7f61b6601&>
- Drop off at the Church during normal Office Hours.
- Bring with you if you schedule a time for Absolution & the Sacrament.
- Beginning May 24th, bring with you when attending services.

16. As a member how can I help?

Pray. Remain in the Word. Follow the recommendations of the CDC and the State of Indiana. Practice social distancing. Wash your hands. Care for your family. Check in on your neighbors, family and church members by phone call, email or text. Continue to provide your offerings to the Church as our bills, payroll and commitments yet continue. As appropriate, we will publicize additional opportunities for service.

If you would like to donate hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, this would be most helpful!

17. Will the Pastors still make house calls?

Yes! Your pastors stand ready to give the members of Advent the Lord's gifts and serve accordingly. Contact them directly or call the Church Office.

18. What is the church phone number and email address?

(317) 873-6318 email: info@adventlutheran.org

19. What are the Elders doing?

Praying for you and your family. Making phone calls to members. Ensuring that our pastors are cared and provided for. Assisting the pastors with the work of Word and Sacrament ministry. Feel free to call them if you need any assistance, have questions, or concerns.

Helpful links to information about the COVID-19 VIRUS:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/> Our government website

<https://www.in.gov/coronavirus/> Our state website

<http://backontrack.in.gov/> Our state's plan for reopening

<https://www.adventlutheran.org/> Our church website with information, services, bulletin and more. Please check and use this regularly!

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7WT2Fb-oxn7Fs7dfYgDuzw/featured> Our YouTube channel for streaming and recorded services, bible studies and other events.