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**August 3, 2020**

**To: All the Sheep of GSLC**

**From: Pastor Paul Baumgartner and John Bost, Chair of Covid Task Force**

We know that as Cherokee County Schools open this week, the question of our own reopening is paramount. We are all anxious to worship in our sanctuary together again, but it is important to do that as safely as possible. Our Covid-19 Task Force has put in many hours trying to navigate that dichotomy. The Task Force intends to present a comprehensive plan to our Council on Tuesday, August 11.

As the Task Force pores over documents from the CDC, the ELCA, and the Southeastern Synod, they have also taken notice of what is happening around us. No other ELCA congregations in our Conference have opened yet. One nearby ELCA congregation opened in July, but then had to close before the month was over. Our closest non-ELCA congregation advertised an August opening, but then changed their plans with no other proposed date for reopening. The local mega-church in our community has announced that they will not open for indoor worship before 2021. Even though Cherokee County is opening schools this week, the surrounding counties are not. Perhaps most importantly, the benchmarks set by the government Task Force, the CDC, the ELCA and the Southeastern Synod have not been met yet. A synodical Zoom meeting for congregational leaders and Bishop Strickland scheduled for Monday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, may provide updated information.

The coronavirus has presented us with an unprecedented situation that must be taken seriously. To date, more than 190,000 people in our state have been infected, and 3,800 people have died. It is out of deep love and concern for you that our Council has not yet scheduled a reopening. Even when that glorious time comes, worship will not be like it was before the pandemic. Social distancing, masks and frequent hand washing will be in effect, even for worship leaders. Our celebration of Holy Communion and the use of music in worship services will probably change as well.

Things will be different when we are able to be together in worship in our sanctuary again, but let us pray that those changes will be short-lived and that the virus will be eradicated. Please continue to keep our Covid-19 Task Force and Council in your prayers as we continue to seek answers to complicated questions. It is hoped that we will be able to bring the recommendations of the Task Force and Council to you as early as next week. In the meantime, let us continue to pray for one another for safety and wellness.