

September 17, 2021

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." – Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

As you have likely seen in the news, hospitalizations in Minnesota related to COVID-19 cases are at their highest point in 2021 and infections among those who are vaccinated – "breakthrough infections" – while still small relative to the overall vaccinated community, represent an increasingly large percentage of new cases. This very week, we have felt those realities at Mount Olivet, as one of our staff and one of our Senior Choir members, both fully vaccinated, tested positive for COVID-19. We are grateful that, because they were vaccinated, neither required hospitalization. And while we do not believe either case was contracted at a Mount Olivet-sponsored event, each of these recent cases reminds us that the pandemic is still with us and we have a responsibility to do our part in keeping our members and community safe.

For this reason, we will continue to require that anyone not vaccinated wear a mask at any indoor Mount Olivet event, and we will now strongly encourage those who are vaccinated to also wear masks at all indoor Mount Olivet events, including Sunday worship. Additionally, we are requiring all staff and volunteers both to be vaccinated and to wear masks while indoors beginning this Sunday.

I realize that many of us may be experiencing "mask-fatigue," but in the larger picture this feels like such a small thing each of us can do to help us move through this pandemic safely and more quickly. Even if you feel comfortable without a mask indoors, I would ask you to wear one for the sake of your neighbor who may not be comfortable, or may be immunocompromised, or may fall in a higher risk category. Taking this small step right now, while we are experiencing a surge in cases related to the Delta-variant, will help us continue our programming, continue our Sunday worship, and continue having our choirs lead us in song. And as the wonderful music provided by our choirs this past Sunday demonstrated, even with masks we can still "make a joyful noise to the Lord."

This kind of resilience, adaptability, and care for neighbor has characterized Mount Olivet's response to the pandemic from its onset. I am hopeful that our efforts now will help us move through and beyond the present surge in the coming weeks and that we can resume more normal interactions soon. In the meantime, we will move forward together with hope, always placing our trust in the Lord who, as we sang during our opening hymn this past Sunday, continues to be our "ruler, guardian, guard, and stay."

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose, Senior Pastor

September 14, 2021

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." – Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

I am writing you with a full heart after a magnificent Rally Sunday and wonderful drive-through Stewardship event last evening. On Sunday, it was so good to see our choirs process and hear their wonderful anthems, and fantastic to see so many Mount Olivet members in-person, some for the first time in eighteen months. Then on Monday we shared 770 meatball dinners, a new Mount Olivet record for a single-day Stewardship event! It was fun to visit with you all as you came to church to pick up your meals, drop off supplies for those who are struggling, and pledge your commitment to the Church for 2022. While there are still challenges ahead of us this fall, these were two important steps forward and they reminded me once again that with God all things are possible.

Much has changed since we planned our Stewardship program this past June and we are adjusting our schedule accordingly. Last night's record turnout for the drive-through indicated that this remains a very popular way to participate in our Stewardship program as we continue to navigate COVID and busy schedules. In addition to the drive-through scheduled at the West campus on Monday, September 20, we are adding another drive-through at the Minneapolis campus next Wednesday, September 22. We are also holding off on several of the meals that have not proved as viable during the recent surge in COVID cases, so if you were planning attending either of the Open House events (9/15 at Mpls, 9/22 at West), or the traditional meal at Mpls on 9/26, please sign up for another Stewardship event. I will put the remaining Stewardship offerings below and you can click on the dates to register.

This Sunday we will confirm 179 young women and men into adult membership, participation, and responsibility at the church as they affirm the promises their parents made for them years earlier at their baptism. While we hold confirmation classes at both campuses, after their shared experience at confirmation camp at Cathedral of the Pines, it's a joy to bring the classes together for a unified, celebratory, and very well attended confirmation service. Soon we'll be entering into a new season of youth programs, new adult learning classes, traditional and new fellowship events, abundant service opportunities, and more! I remain so grateful for the chance to serve in this role and am grateful for your prayers, support, generosity, and commitment.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose, Senior Pastor

To register for a stewardship meal, please visit our Stewardship webpage [here](#).

September 9, 2021

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." – Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

This Sunday is Rally Sunday, and I am so excited to see you at Church, to hear our choirs and watch them process, and to enter into a fall season full of opportunities to grow in faith. Toward making the most of all these opportunities, I want to offer several updates:

First and foremost, several words of gratitude:

- for the progress in our community and state health conditions that made it possible for us to worship in-person safely since March 28 and to resume singing in worship and gathering without masks or social distancing since May 30;
- for the creativity and resilience of our staff in offering resources to keep us connected and strengthen our faith across the entire course of this pandemic;
- for a full, joyful, and safe summer of growth in faith and relationships at Cathedral of the Pines Camp;
- for the hard work and fidelity of the leaders and staff at our affiliated ministries and their exceptional care for some of the most vulnerable in our community;
- for the generosity and commitment of our congregation throughout this season of unprecedented challenges; and
- for the grace of God which makes all things possible and sustains us in faith and life!

While health conditions in our state are greatly improved from a year ago because of the successful rollout of the vaccine, we are not yet through this pandemic and are currently experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases because of the Delta variant. In order to continue caring for our members and community, we are taking the following steps:

- Worship will continue much as it has been, with the expectation that those who are not yet vaccinated wear masks at any indoor activities at Mount Olivet, including worship. Those who are vaccinated are certainly welcome to wear masks, but that is not required. We are a highly-vaccinated community and recent research about the efficacy of the vaccine gives us confidence this is a safe path forward.
- So much ministry takes place at Mount Olivet because of our wonderful volunteers. This fall, we are requiring that all staff and volunteers at Mount Olivet be vaccinated. This strategy was part of what contributed to a successful and safe season at Cathedral of the Pines and will continue to protect volunteers, participants, and other members of our community.
- All staff and volunteers working with children and youth, and all children and youth participating in activities at Mount Olivet, will be masked indoors to provide the greatest possible protection for our kids.

This past year, I have been reminded again and again of how God's grace leads us, encourages us, and makes all things possible. As we enter into our second "pandemic-influenced" Stewardship season, we have a tremendous opportunity to recognize that amid the challenges we are experiencing, God is still faithful and we are still – and in so many ways – a blessed people and congregation! There has never been a greater need for Mount Olivet's presence in our community, and your faithful stewardship of God's many blessings makes our ministry possible. Please [sign up](#) to participate in one of the three Stewardship meal options to learn more about our hopes for the coming year, please take stock of how God has blessed you in many and varied ways through the ministries of this congregation, and please make a pledge of financial support for the coming year. It will take all of us to live into God's dreams for Mount Olivet. Thank you!

There are challenges ahead of us, but they pale in comparison to the riches of God's mercy, the promise of God's presence, and the opportunities to witness in word and deed the grace of God we know in Christ. I continue to be so tremendously grateful for the privilege of leading this marvelous congregation. We are getting through this, dear Mount Olivet Family. We are getting through it together and, by God's grace, coming out stronger on the other side.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose

May 21, 2021

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." – Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

The last few weeks have brought a lot of good news related to the possibility of returning to more normal patterns in our lives, including our worship lives. Following last week's announcement from the state of Minnesota easing COVID restrictions, and after a discussion with the Executive Committee of our Church Council today, here is a summary of our plans at Mount Olivet as we move into the summer.

Sunday, May 23

- At the West campus, those who are fully vaccinated no longer need to wear a mask in accordance with CDC and MDH guidelines. Those who are not fully vaccinated are asked to wear a mask while indoors.
- At the Minneapolis campus, we will continue to wear masks indoors until the City of Minneapolis ends its mandate.

Sunday, May 30

- We will no longer social distance during worship.
- We will resume congregational singing.
- Additional worship service outside at Lake Harriet Bandshell at 10am.

Sunday, June 6

- Worship at 9 and 10am at both campuses. (Note that we are eliminating the hour gap in-between services.)

Two additional notes:

- While we are making masks optional for those who are vaccinated as state and municipal guidelines allow, please know that you are of course invited to continue wearing masks if that makes you more comfortable.
- A reminder that we will continue to record and post worship online through the summer, returning to livestreaming services in the fall.

It has been such a challenging year, in many ways unlike anything in the 101-year history of this congregation. I am again so grateful for the creativity and resilience of our staff and for the commitment, prayers, and generosity of the whole congregation. We are getting through this, dear Mount Olivet Family. We are getting through it together and, by God's grace, coming out stronger on the other side.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose
Senior Pastor

May 14, 2021

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." – Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

For nearly eighteen months, we've been working together to navigate a global pandemic in a way that keeps our members connected, strengthens our faith at a time when our faith has never been more important, and do our part to keep our members, staff, and community safe. It has not always been easy. Yet we persevered, committed to keeping our Lord's command to love our neighbors. In light of the various press releases of late – including two from the Governor and one from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – I am writing to let you know that on Sunday, May 30, we will take two more significant steps forward by discontinuing the requirement of social distancing in our sanctuaries and by resuming congregational singing.

We have not yet made a decision about wearing masks during in-person Sunday worship for several reasons. First, the CDC's updated guidance suggests relaxing mask wearing in some indoor settings, but not all, and sanctuaries filled with persons singing is one of the categories not clearly addressed. Second, the CDC counsel is that all vaccinated people can remove masks but that unvaccinated people should not, and we are not in a position to know who is vaccinated and do not want to make those kinds of distinctions in our worshiping community. Third, singing has typically been considered a higher risk activity, particularly when unmasked. Finally, while the state has ended its mask mandate, the City of Minneapolis has not, and other businesses and communities are also currently assessing their requirements.

For these reasons, we will take the next two weeks to consult with health professionals, look for further guidance from elected officials, gather the Executive Committee of the Church Council to discuss safety protocols, and then share another update no later than Friday, May 28. Similarly, we will continue holding in-person Sunday worship at both campuses at 9:00 and 11:00am for the next two weeks and include any revisions to our worship schedule in that same update. I appreciate your patience as we take a little more time to make our next and significant steps forward with confidence.

While there is still some uncertainty about when all aspects of our life will return to normal, I want to underscore strongly just how much forward movement we have experienced in the last few weeks. We are at a point when there is not only light at the end of the tunnel, but it is growing brighter each day and week. I am thankful for the progress we have made thus far, look forward to that continuing across the summer, and am eager to resume so many of our cherished practices and traditions this fall.

We are getting through this, dear Mount Olivet Family. We are getting through it together and, by God's grace, coming out stronger on the other side.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose
Senior Pastor

April 20, 2021 - Together @ Mount Olivet

"What does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." – Micah 6:8

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

This has been a tense week after a traumatic year in which we were confronted as a community with the racism that has often been called "America's original sin." As people of faith, we believe that incidents like the tragic killing of George Floyd and, more recently, Daunte Wright, fall far from the intention that God has for us as a people. With the verdict so recently announced, it is likely that some will assume that this difficult chapter in our history is over. But while the trial may have concluded, as Christians we know that God's call to pray and work for greater understanding, justice, and peace is ongoing. Over the last year, we at Mount Olivet have tried to listen to and learn from those within and beyond our community, and especially to persons of color, about the realities of racial injustice and how we can address them as individuals and a community of faith. We have also worked with partner organizations striving to make our communities more equitable, rebuild neighborhoods that have suffered, and meet the day-to-day needs of our neighbors. These efforts will continue, as both the present need and opportunity are great.

As we move toward a future we trust God is already fashioning, we may sometimes differ on the best course of action, the most fitting response to crisis, or the most appropriate path to take. As we take steps forward, I will strive both to communicate clearly and listen carefully, trusting that our conversations and actions will be guided first and foremost by reverent obedience to the call of Jesus to love God by loving our neighbor. This past Sunday, Pastor Kalland and Pastor Ruud preached on Jesus' last words to his disciples, often called "The Great Commission." That commission – to share the good news of Christ with all – is still ours. After sharing that commission, Jesus goes on to share what I refer to as "The Great Promise," that he will be with us always, even to the close of the age. As we work together for a peace born of equity, that promise is also still ours, and we remain confident that Christ is supporting us, accompanying us, and leading us to be the people God needs us to be at this time and in this place for the sake of the world and people God loves so much.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose

March 18, 2021 - Update

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." –Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

As I shared in my last letter to you, I am so excited that conditions with regard to the pandemic have improved sufficiently to allow us to resume in-person Sunday worship at both our Minneapolis and West campuses beginning on Palm Sunday, March 28. I write now to share more detailed information about these worship services and the process by which you can register for them. All of this information is also, as of today, available on our website.

Registration

- Registration opens at mtolivet.org at 9am the Monday prior to each Sunday's worship. For instance, registration for worship on March 28 opens on Monday, March 22, at 9am.
- If you have difficulty registering online, call Nancy Nelson at 612.767.2264. Nancy is the only staff member authorized to register members. If you call the church office, there will be a menu option to direct your call to Nancy.
- If you are not able to register for a particular Sunday, remember that there will be more! It may be that, initially, we will not all be able to worship every week and for now we can take turns. Also, online worship continues.

Service Times and Numbers

- Beginning Palm Sunday, March 28, in-person worship services will be at 9am and 11am at both campuses.
- We will begin by registering 200 worshippers at Minneapolis and 100 at West per service time. As we gain confidence in our abilities to manage traffic flow safely and as conditions continue to improve, we expect that number to increase.
- For Easter, we will add a 7am service and, if need be, a 1pm service at both campuses, and registration will increase to 250 at Mpls and 150 at West per service.

Logistics

- Doors will be open 30 minutes before worship and the prelude will begin 15 minutes prior to worship.
- Areas in both sanctuaries will be marked for clear and socially-distanced seating.
- **Masks and advanced registration will be required**, both so we know how many will be coming and in order to contact trace in case we have reports of an infection.
- There will be no bulletins, singing, or offering plates passed.

Two additional notes. First, if you are hesitant to come to worship, whether because you have an underlying health condition or live with someone who does, you haven't been vaccinated yet, or are just not yet ready for large gatherings, please hear me say clearly: *that is okay!* Feel good about being able to worship online and connecting with your faith and church in this way.

Second, the worship that is most like traditional Mount Olivet worship will continue to be recorded in advance and provided online. It will be glorious to be in our sanctuaries again, but I want to be clear that pandemic-adapted worship, particularly absent choral and congregational song, will be different. We will continue with both forms of worship – online and in-person – for as long as necessary and until we can resume our normal patterns of worship which, of course, will include choirs and singing.

In closing, I want to thank you for your willingness to sacrifice in order to fulfill Christ's command to love our neighbor. I also want to urge you to continue wearing masks and being careful in your interactions. We are so, so close to coming out of

this pandemic. The last six weeks have seen remarkable progress, though the last week has been more ominous. Which is a reminder that we are close, but not yet there. We've come too far, and sacrificed too much, to falter now. Keep up the good work!

As I've said before, so I will say again: We will get through this, dear Mount Olivet Family. We will get through it together and, by God's grace, come out stronger on the other side.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose

February 17, 2021

"I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." —Psalm 121

Dear Mount Olivet Family,

I am writing to offer an update on the Church's response to developments in our on-going battle with the coronavirus. First, I want to say that I have been so incredibly grateful for your support of the decisions we have made thus far, your response to the needs of our community through your manifold donations, and your support of our church's vital ministries through your faithful generosity. As the Apostle Paul wrote to his beloved congregation in Philippi, so I also say to you: "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you!" (Phil 1:3-4).

After a very difficult winter surge in infections, hospitalizations, and deaths in November and December, late January and February have offered a much more hopeful picture, as those numbers are all dropping even as state- and nation-wide vaccination programs are expanded. At the same time, it's important to recognize that current rates are still higher than at any time during the spring and summer surges of last year. So while the pandemic clearly is not fully behind us, we are making progress!

Last fall, we developed and shared three community-health metrics that would guide our decisions about when it would be safest and most faithful to resume in-person Sunday worship:

- A test positivity rate of less than 3% for at least two weeks.
- A rate of infection spread (R-Naught) of less than 1 for at least two weeks.
- The successful rollout of a vaccination program that has at least inoculated the majority of health-care providers and the most vulnerable among us and is in initial stages of being distributed to the rest of the population.

These metrics were identified with the counsel of medical professionals to indicate when we could hold worship in a way that not only mitigates the risk for our members and staff, but also reduces the chance that any infections that may occur as a result of our actions will not spark or contribute to a new surge.

We have clearly satisfied one of those markers (rate of infection spread) and are closing in on the other two. At the same time, you have likely heard reports of several new and more contagious variant strains of the virus. Right now, it feels like we are in a race to see whether the vaccines or variations take hold, and March will be a critical indicator of which one wins the race.

Because of the significant improvement in these indicators, and based on our hope that conditions will continue to improve, we are planning to resume limited in-person Sunday worship on Palm Sunday, March 28. As with our current Wednesday open prayer times, those Sunday worship services will be socially distanced, limited in number, absent congregational and choral singing, and spaced out to allow time for all cleaning protocols. In addition, advanced registration and masks will be required. I will share more information about the times of services, number of spaces, and other factors early in March as we continue to see how the situation unfolds in the communities we serve. And, if conditions worsen, we will be prepared to delay our plans for the sake of our community.

During this “interim” time of offering in-person worship adapted for the pandemic, we will continue to record and make available all worship services online so that those who do not want to, or should not, attend in-person worship can continue to be nurtured in their faith by the online worship offerings of the Church.

Yes, there is light at the end of the tunnel, and how we conduct ourselves in the coming weeks will absolutely determine how quickly we can move back to some semblance of normal. When this is behind us, I hope that we can rejoice in the sacrifices we have made in order to do our part to defeat this virus. As we enter into the season of Lent today and focus on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, I am mindful of our Lord’s instructions to his first disciples on the eve of his crucifixion: “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:34-35).

We will get through this, dear Mount Olivet Family. We will get through it together and, by God’s grace, come out stronger on the other side.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose
Senior Pastor

PS: A reminder that you can find our digital resources for Lent, including two Ash Wednesday services (one with communion and one with the faith stories of our youth) on the [Lent at Mount Olivet](#) page.