

May 7, 2020

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

After prayerful and careful consideration and deliberation, the council has decided to continue to conduct worship via live streaming for the next two weeks (through May 17). The council plans to hold a special meeting May 18 to determine if the situation has changed sufficiently to resume worship together on the Lord's day.

The catechism season will have concluded by that date, and Family Visitation continues to be on hold.

This was not an easy decision to make, for the council strongly desires to resume corporate worship. We are thankful to be able to worship together via live streaming, but we long for reverent worship in God's house where we can hear the preaching of the Word, pray together, sing Psalms together, and enjoy covenant fellowship with one another. The council also desires fellowship so we can better carry out our responsibilities to the congregation as pastor, elders, and deacons. All things considered, however, the council believes it is best for the overall welfare of the congregation to continue as we have been for a while longer. For additional information, the official grounds for making this decision are included at the end of this message.

The council plans to send letters to the governor, state representatives, and county supervisors explaining how we are able to worship together safely and encouraging them to lift the ban on public worship services. We encourage you to write these officials as well. To help, the council will send the congregation their addresses and an example letter that can be used as a template.

It is likely special safety measures will be necessary when corporate worship resumes. The council has formed a special committee to make necessary preparations so we will be ready when that day arrives.

Please contact one of the Council members if you have any needs or concerns. The congregation is on our minds and in our prayers, and we covet your prayers as well.

II Samuel 22:31: As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

In Christ,

The Council of Hope Protestant Reformed Church

Grounds for extending our decision to worship via live streaming:

1. The grounds of our initial decision on March 21 still apply.

- a. Regarding obedience to 6th commandment, public health officials still deem the coronavirus is a threat.
 - b. Regarding obedience to the 5th commandment, the state has not yet relaxed the restrictions regarding gatherings.
2. There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors. With only one exception, the other churches of our denomination have obeyed government orders during this time. The same thing holds true in the broader church world.
3. While there may come a day when civil disobedience is necessary for the sake of the spiritual health of the congregation, we do not believe we have reached that point. While it is true that the way in which we are worshipping is inferior to physical, public worship, nevertheless, the congregation is receiving spiritual nourishment at this time. In addition, Jesus taught: “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).
4. The council does not believe Acts 5:29 (“we ought to obey God, rather than men”) applies at this time. The context of Peter’s statement was the attempt of Jewish authorities to silence Christians and to do so permanently. The current public health orders are not targeted at Christians for their religion and they are of a temporary nature. Should the authorities continue the restrictions unjustly or discriminatorily, then we may arrive at the point where we do apply Acts 5:29.
5. Abiding by the public health order will better serve as a witness of love for the brother and obedience to the magistrate, both internally to the members of our own congregation and externally to the community around us.
6. The council does not believe that the state has the authority to determine whether the church may worship. Matters such as the worship of God belong solely to the church of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, God has instituted the government for the protection of its citizens, which includes issuing public health orders.