



# *Our Saviour's Lutheran Church*

*of Stanwood, Washington*

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September 15, 2021– Congregational Letter #28 regarding COVID-19

Dear Friends and Members of Our Saviour's;

**“All are Welcome. All are Safe.”**

“Love is **patient**. Love is **kind**.” 1 Corinthians 13:1

Last week, I made a decision that opened the door for division within our church, for which I am sorry!

I have been telling people that we, as a church, are going to have to find a way to live with this virus because it is not going to go away soon. We are not going to shut down the church, we are going to have to figure out how we live in this reality. Many people in our country and in our church have very strong feelings about the call to be vaccinated. Whether our people are vaccinated or not, the overall goal has been and will be to be **“welcome to all”** and **“maintain safety for all.”** Herein lies the challenge in achieving both of these goals. Both of these goals will be achieved as we discern each decision and circumstance one at a time.

Last week, I sent a letter to the congregation with the decision that would require all people attending the men's and women's retreat be vaccinated. I made that decision in an attempt to create a safe environment for people who had health concerns. But I quickly discovered that in so doing, I had made a decision in which many people felt the sting of being unwelcomed.

As we live through these challenging and changing conditions, my hope and prayer is that we can heed St. Paul's words to be patient and kind with one another. My hope and prayer is that we can move beyond our personal views and look for higher ground. As Jesus stated, “The world will know we are his disciples by the love we have for one another.” (John 13:35) This pandemic is testing and challenging us to live out those words clearly and tangibly. “Agape” love, “unconditional” love, is a difficult call. We can only love in this manner through the power of the Holy Spirit. But knowing that we have the Holy Spirit living within us, we can call on Him to help us. The Holy Spirit can empower us to help keep our hearts and minds open to one another, to truly listen to one another for understanding, especially when we differ in our perspectives. And that we would honor and respect one another as fellow believers in Christ. This pandemic has given us a tangible and true opportunity to test our capacity to love as individuals and as a church body. How would you say we are doing? How can each one of us, personally and publicly, act to create a more welcoming and safe environment?

OSLC Mission Statement:

***Encounter God ~ Encourage Believers ~ Extend His Kingdom***

I witnessed Christian love last Sunday. After the late worship service, I saw 5 women surround a woman who worshipped with us for the first time. She and her husband joined us and they were engaged in warm conversation and smiles. They were offered coffee and refreshments. By the time they left, they told me that they would certainly be back. I believe, in that moment, this couple experienced a welcoming and safe congregation.

I also personally experienced Christian love last Sunday. After church, I approached a fellow brother and asked what he thought about the men's retreat. He mentioned the requirement put in the letter I had sent out. We talked. We opened up our hearts to each other. We talked about the frustrations, limitations and struggles this pandemic has placed on each of us personally, in our community and in our church. We listened to each other and during our exchange, we wanted to find a solution to the problem. Suddenly the answer emerged. Since the truth is that whether one is vaccinated or not, any person can carry and spread the virus and not know it. The only true way to know if someone is not infected is by a negative COVID test. Therefore, we determined that if everyone going to the retreat is willing to be tested, vaccinated or not, for the sake of the others, 72 hours before we attend the retreat, everyone can know (yes, there is still a minute risk), that the **environment will be safe** – and we will have reclaimed the goal – that **ALL are welcome**. We were excited about the possibility. And as I have shared this option, all are on board so that no one is excluded. This idea is being proposed for the women's retreat as well. To schedule a free test – go to **testdirectly.com** – and you can schedule an appointment in Burlington. The zip code is 98274.

In that moment, I believe that I experienced what it means when Jesus commands us to, "Love one another" in a tangible way! And I believe my brother did also.

I am not beyond making mistakes and making short-sighted judgments. But I am committed and determined to strive to achieve the goal where we at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church will do all we can to maintain the environment where – All are Welcome – and All are Safe! Will you join me in this effort? It will be difficult. But let us be a light on the Stanwood hill - that we lead with Love – and when we miss the mark – we forgive one another – and continue the quest to love as Christ calls us to do.

During Sunday morning worship and at Wednesday night Connexion, we are asking people to wear masks – whether vaccinated or not – in order to maintain the goal of a welcoming, safe environment.

Tonight, we begin the Alpha Course presented by Pastor Nicky Gumbel at 6 p.m. In one of his talks, he makes the comment – as we seek to share Christ, let us remember that our focus is to **"win the person" not "win the argument"**. People are going to have differing views about many subjects and topics. But we want to care more about the person than the particular issue. Certainly, that is what Jesus modeled for us.

If I caused hurt to any of you with last week's letter, again, I apologize, and if you would like to talk further, I would love to hear from you. 425-293-1974.

Seeking Higher Ground!

Sincerely Yours,  
Pastor Mark