

## *Our Worship Plans for Stage 3*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at Foothills:

The COVID committee of our congregation is looking forward to the stage 3 opening for the province of Alberta. We know that the coming days are being met with excitement by many. We also know that there are those who are wary and uncertain of what will happen as we “open for summer”.

Throughout the days of COVID there have always been more questions than answers. We have tried faithfully and lovingly to navigate these things for the good of our members. We know that we have not been able to satisfy each and every member of the congregation. We are a diverse family, and as such we have a multitude of different feelings and ideas on many things. Yet, as St. Paul says: ***“so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*** (Romans 12:5, ESV)

Most of our work focuses on how we care for this one body in Christ. We are well aware that our congregation is comprised of many who are among the most vulnerable and susceptible to COVID. Our love and concern for them is a key factor for our considerations.

Looking ahead, as we begin in stage 3, we will observe the following protocols for our Foothills Lutheran family:

1. Beginning with the service on July 4, 2021 we will no longer require registration for worship. As the restriction on numbers is lifted, this is no longer a concern for us. We will not be asking people to go through a screening, although we will continue good sanitization practices. The tables creating traffic flow will be removed; we will have hand sanitizer available throughout the building, at various places in the narthex. Please remember to self-monitor and stay home if you are not feeling well.
2. Seating will no longer need to be assigned, and distancing will not be necessary. We do encourage people to maintain cohorts as much as possible.
3. Masks have been a concern for many—both those who see no benefit in them, and those who feel strongly about being masked. We discussed this at great length, as we do want to make everyone feel safe and welcome in God’s house. We must continue to follow the city of Calgary bylaw on masking, which means that masks will be required for the immediate future. Even if that bylaw is rescinded, **we will continue to require masks for the month of July.**

We see this as an act of love and care for those who, again, are more vulnerable, including unvaccinated children. We do know that this is an inconvenience for some, but we are moved by the words of Holy Scripture: ***“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** (Philippians 2:1–4, ESV)

4. We do not know at this time what the expectations will be regarding congregational singing. We do believe that we will be free to resume singing as part of our worship, but masks will be required for our singing.

5. Activities such as sharing the peace, handshaking and hugging are “on hold” as we come back together. Since the weather at this time of the year makes gathering outside permissible, we ask that people not remain in the narthex or the parish hall, but visit outside instead. We will not have chairs and tables available in the parish hall for this reason.
6. We will not be resuming our coffee fellowship following the service until September. This provides both an extra time of safety as well as a time to ‘gear up’ again for this activity.
7. Due to the struggles with the sanitizing of books, we will not replace the hymnals and bibles in the pew racks until September.
8. Once the mask bylaw in Calgary is lifted, the pastors will not wear masks when directly involved in leading worship, provided that they are maintaining a 2 metre distance from the congregation. This is a common concern that is expressed, that the masks have made it harder for people to hear and understand the pastors. They will wear masks when seated, for hymns and at any point where they are not involved in the liturgy.
9. Holy Communion will continue to be done “pilgrim style”, with no kneeling at the altar. The pastors will continue to be masked for the distribution of Holy Communion.

We know that there is a great deal of information here. In some ways we are getting back to normal, and yet we still have some restrictions. Our practices are not intended to show any disrespect or disagreement with the government regulations, but to respond to the needs of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is our love for one another that leads us as we look to the coming days. There may be some discomfort for all of us, but how blessed we are to be able to gather, to share in the Word, to provide that mutual consolation and to do it as we make every effort to love and care for one another as the people precious to the Saviour who died and rose for us all. May His name be glorified among us!

Some other brief thoughts:

- we will continue to stream our services. We are thankful that the equipment we have been planning to install for months has finally arrived and should be in use very soon.
- We are planning to hold our July 18<sup>th</sup> service outside, in a small effort to remind ourselves of the ways we have traditionally observed the time during the Stampede. We will not be holding a breakfast this year.

May God truly bless us as we look to the days ahead under His grace.

In His service to our congregation,

Foothills COVID committee.