

Dear Grace Family,

On Monday evening, your Council met for our regular monthly meeting. Among other important items, we discussed our current suspension of in-person activities at the church. ***The Council voted to extend our suspension of in-person activities at the church through June 30th.*** There were a few different points that influenced this decision:

- (1) The data of rising hospitalizations for COVID-19 in NC, and, more specifically, the rise in confirmed cases in Watauga County;
- (2) the NC Synod's Re-gathering Task Force guidance about refraining from in-person gatherings until we enter Phase 3 of the Governor's reopening plan, and
- (3) the news that we will hear from the Governor next by June 26th.

The Council will meet again via Zoom on June 29th to discuss our next steps. Our hope is that everyone is staying safe. The Council has committed to reaching out to every household again to check in on each member.

Over the past few weeks, we invited everyone to participate in a poll related to creating a drive-in worship option. In total, 65 members completed the survey. Of those, 50 said that they were pleased with the current online worship and didn't feel a drive-in worship option was necessary right now. We'll continue to consider other options for worship, but we were encouraged that our online-worship has been so well-received.

Over the past few months, we have been tracking online worship participation, per the new worship attendance guidelines created by the ELCA, and a formula for engagement that I created. The ELCA formula tracks the number of unique devices (phones, tablets, computers, SmartTV's, etc.) who watch any part of a worship service (on both YouTube and Facebook) and assumes that, on average, 2 people participate in worship per device. Using this formula, since March 15th, we have been averaging about 650 people participating in at least some part of worship each week!

I have created my own formula for tracking the depth of engagement in worship each week. I look at the total number of minutes each worship service is viewed (on both YouTube and Facebook). I assumed that fully participating in a worship service is viewing 75% of the service that each screen is viewed, on average, by 1.5 people. Using this formula, it means that we've been averaging about 175 people deeply engaging in worship each week.

While both of these formulas only tell part of the story, what has me encouraged is that we, as a congregation, have been able to quickly move into online worship and have been able to engage so many folks at such a deep level. This is amazing and God is good!

As previously promised, we will plan to continue the online worship services for the foreseeable future, regardless of when we decide to resume in-person activities. We know that for many in our congregation who fall in the high-risk category, safely resuming in-person activities like worship will first require access to a vaccine.

Finally, I just wanted to remind everyone that the monthly Council Reports are always available on our website (graceboone.org/church-publications). These reports have lots of great information about everything that is happening in our congregation and all the things on which our Council is working. If you ever find yourself wondering about what is going on at Grace, these reports are a great place to start!

Thank you all for your patience and support over the past 3 months. This has been a challenging time but it has also been a time of lots of new learnings. I have seen the Spirit of Pentecost alive in our congregation and give thanks for being able to be in ministry alongside each and everyone of you!

In Grace,

Pastor Steve