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Greetings in the holy name of Jesus!

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. (Psalm 5:11)

I wanted to write to all of you to give you the results of our recent survey entitled, “St. Luke Return to Worship Survey.” First, I would like to thank all of you who took time out to complete the survey. It was very important to hear from you. We wanted your input regarding your returning to worship, worries, comfort level, outdoor worship, service times and family events. There were 127 responses to the survey.

A resounding 102 (80%) responded that they would attend a properly distanced, safe service (masks) outdoor service. 21 (16.5%) responded “maybe” and 4 (3.2%) responded no. Please note that virtually all your individual concerns expressed in the survey have already been considered by the Return to Operations (RTO) Committee that is assisting me in preparing the return to worship. I have great confidence that you all will adjust to the “new normal” of worship. Of course, there will be bumps in the road. Our concern is that you are comfortable in safely returning to worship. I love you all and want you to feel and be safe. There will be training of the deacons, ushers and altar guild to establish best practices for worship. Please refer to our YouTube video (coming soon) regarding return to worship.

Here is the good news! I am excited to announce, if you have not heard already, that we will be returning to in person outdoor worship on **Sunday, July 5 and Wednesday evening, July 8**. The worship service will be held on the “great lawn” between the two parsonages. All worshippers will need to bring their own chairs and masks. We ask that you print out your own bulletins from home and bring them to avoid unnecessary contact. We will provide a limited number of bulletins. Ushers will escort all worshippers to designated seating areas. We ask your cooperation in this regard. We ask that you park in the lower parking lot so that our seniors and those with physical disabilities can use upper lot. There will be no physical sign of peace, rather we ask that you wave, give a “peace sign” or other gesture. There will be no offering plate collection. You may place your envelopes and tithes in the boxes that will be provided at the service.

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Here are St. Luke's **RETURN TO OPERATION PRINCIPLES (RTO)** that we will follow.

These principles apply across the entire congregation. They are not at the discretion of individuals, ministry teams, or others. They have been enacted by our parish leadership for the safety and protection of everyone. They apply through all phases of the RTO process.

- **We Believe in God.**

As the Holy Spirit has called us to faith in Christ Jesus, we believe in God and serve Him. As we do, we use the gifts He has given us and whatever we do in word or in deed, we do in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

- **We Strive to Protect All.**

The protection of all who come to worship is a top priority. We encourage anyone who has underlying health concerns to remain home until the issues with the pandemic have improved. Providing for the spiritual needs of all remains our goal, including the offering of digital worship services for those who are unable to attend.

- **We Acknowledge a Phase-Based Approach.**

Employees and parishioners will be invited to return in phases, influenced by factors outlined below. Employees and Parishioners who return may need to work/worship from home for periods of time depending on applicable government orders or personal factors.

- **We Comply with Government Directives.**

RTO is driven by the status of applicable shelter-in-place/stay-at-home orders and the phased return described by the government of NYS. Some activities in our congregation may begin earlier while others may be delayed. This will be determined based on government guidelines and directives from the parish leadership.

- **We Follow the Advice of the CDC.**

We will continue to follow the guidelines issued by the CDC. This is for the safety and protection of all.

- **We Observe Physical Distancing Measures.**

We expect physical distancing measures to be followed.

- **We Use Personal Face Coverings and Other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).**

We ask all who come for worship, activities, or work to use a personal mask and other personal protective equipment as necessary in conjunction with the requirements outlined by NYS and the CDC.

- **We Support Individual Specific Needs**

Even if the church office is open and operating consistent with CDC guidelines, certain employees, volunteers, or members may not be able to return to office work, normal volunteer activities, or worship. We support the needs of everyone and we shall work with people who have a legitimate need to remain at home due to health risk factors, lack of childcare, etc.

- **We Treat Everyone with Respect**

We take accountability for our own actions and treat each other with respect. We do not need to be policing others and their personal social distancing measures upon return to the office/church.

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- **We Practice Good Hygiene.**
 - We wash hands vigorously with soap and water or use hand sanitizer for at least 20 seconds.
 - We avoid touching our faces.
 - We use a face covering when in public.
 - We stay at home when we are not feeling well. We come to church only when we are asymptomatic (no fever, cough, or feeling ill) for the last 14 days. We also stay home for 14 days when we have been exposed to the virus.

There will be two Sunday services: one at 9 a.m. and the second at 11:00 a.m. Please note the time change for the second service. We will return to a contemporary worship service on Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m. on the lawn. The Wednesday service lessons will be the identical lessons from the prior Sunday. In the event of rain on Sunday, we will cancel outdoor worship by 5 p.m. on Saturday so please check your emails before you come. Should it rain overnight on Saturday and the field is wet we may also cancel the Sunday service that morning. In the event of rain on Wednesday, we will cancel the service and notify everyone by email.

The first two Sundays and Wednesdays will be the Service of the Word only, i.e. no Holy Communion. I think we need to get use to worshipping with these restrictions before we begin receiving Holy Communion.

I long to receive Holy Communion as much as you all have expressed in the survey. In our survey, we asked, "When we begin to add Holy Communion to the outdoor service, will you come up to receive communion?" 80 (63%) responded yes. 32 (25.2%) responded maybe and 15 (11.8%) responded no. So, we will begin services with Holy Communion on July 19. We will publish additional guidelines for Holy Communion as we get closer to July 19.

Please note that, **I will continue recording the virtual service** for the foreseeable future for those who wish to worship in that manner.

We also asked if you would be interested in attending a safe outdoor family event on the grounds of St. Luke, e.g. movie night. 54 (42%) people responded yes. 47 (37%) responded maybe. 19 (15%) responded no and 7 (5.5%) responded N/A. Based on your responses, we will begin family activities starting with a Bingo night on **Thursday, July 9**. Please visit www.stlukedixhills.org/familyfun for time and more information.

I want to close with your responses to the question, "What are you looking most forward to and/or most excited about when we get back together." I cannot wait to see "our St. Luke family/amazing congregation in person again, being with my brothers and sisters in Christ...fellowship together and feeling that sense of community." Let us rejoice and exult and sing to the Lord and pray for His constant protection over us!

Peace+

Thomas W. Cusanelli

Pastor Tom

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