

## A Message from the Rector: *Change is Coming*



“When are we going to return to in-person worship?” I get asked this question frequently. Sometimes it is me doing the asking. Sometimes it is one of the members of St. Luke’s or Good Shepherd. Sometimes it is a friend or family member, surprised to learn that the churches I serve are still refraining from gathering for worship in-person, yet continuing to meet virtually every week for worship on ZOOM and social media. Whoever is asking, my answer was and is still the same. We will return to in-person worship when it is safe to do so for ourselves and the community in which we reside. We will return when the danger has passed.

Knowing when this will be, has been difficult to determine. Guided by our bishop, we, along with our sister congregations in the Diocese of Missouri, have prayerfully followed scientists and medical experts’ advice and refrained from practicing indoor in-person worship for the better part of the past year. We have sacrificed for the common good, out of a sense of putting into practice the biblical admonition, “**Love thy neighbor, as thyself.**”

As I write these words, change is in the air. Today, Ash Wednesday, the Holy Season of Lent has begun. As in the cartoon above, Christians everywhere contemplate what they will change and “give up” or what spiritual commitments they will “take up” during the 40-day Lenten journey. Yet practicing the disciplines of Lent in 2021, following a year that felt like 365 days of giving

up just about **everything** we think of as part and parcel to a “normal” life, can be challenging, to say the least. The thought of giving up one more blessed Sunday of sacrificing and fasting from in-person worship in our sacred spaces devoted to worship is burdensome. I understand, really, I do, and I share with you in the longing to return to worship together. **So, it brings me great joy to tell you that such a day is coming soon!**

The data related to COVID-19 has been trending in the right direction. **This fact, along with the availability of vaccines, has prompted Bishop Johnson to lift the suspension of in-person worship and allow communities of faith to resume services at 20% of their maximum capacity.** This new guidance gives St. Luke’s the capacity to safely welcome as many as 30 people to in-person services, while Good Shepherd can safely accommodate 25 people (assuming some of those are sitting in the choir loft.)

Therefore, the date of **Palm Sunday, March 28<sup>th</sup>**, has been chosen as the Sunday that both St. Luke’s and Church of the Good Shepherd will return to in-person indoor worship services. We will need to stay vigilant and monitor the pandemic data to ensure that it remains safe to return. We will need to be ready to adjust course should conditions related to the pandemic turn unsafe again in the future. We must also take steps to prepare our churches for accommodating safely those who choose to gather for worship, not to mention efforts to allow us to livestream our services to those who need to continue to worship safely in a virtual format from home.

**Updates will be shared in our weekly E-News, so please stay tuned. If you would like to be involved in the reopening planning and preparations in the weeks ahead, see below for more information.** In the meantime, continue to join us each week for worship on ZOOM, and Facebook Live, Sundays, at 10:00 a.m.

**Faithfully Yours,**

**Fr. Earl Mahan**

### **Planning Meeting for Our Return to In-Person Worship**

The clergy, staff, and musicians of St. Luke’s and Good Shepherd meet weekly every Monday at 10:00 a.m. by ZOOM. Those who want to be part of the planning for our upcoming return to in-person worship are welcome to join the ZOOM meeting at 10:30 a.m. **[CLICK HERE TO JOIN THE MEETING.](#)**