



March 2021

Dear Friend of Christ Community Church,

Greetings to you in the name of the risen Christ! I hope you're doing well these days despite the challenges we've all endured this past year because of the global pandemic. It feels like many of us have been apart for quite a long time, which is hard on the soul. As human beings made in the image of the Triune God, we were made for connection and community. When we don't have that personal connection, we tend to feel empty and incomplete, even despairing of life sometimes—not unlike the first-century lepers Jesus encountered, precious souls who isolated themselves from society indefinitely. When Jesus healed them, he did more than take away their contagions; he restored them to community life.

With the number of virus cases dropping around the world, and vaccinations becoming more available to us, might you be sensing that it's time to reconnect? Safely and wisely, of course—faith doesn't mean foolishness—but reconnecting, nonetheless. At Christ Community Church, we've done what we can to help keep people safe on site. The rooms we use at Dech Chapel are sanitized each week. Every other pew is roped off, and parishioners practice reasonable social distancing. Most people are masked upon entry and exit to the worship services, and many stay masked the entire time they're on site. We no longer pass the offering plates, nor do we have a greeting time during the service. We've also offered a livestreaming service on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, along with our regular radio broadcasts.

This is life in 2021. Local businesses, restaurants, grocery stores, and doctors' offices all see this same dynamic at work, and many of us still frequent such places to utilize their services, keeping ourselves as safe as possible in the process. Non-profit organizations, like churches, have been hit the hardest because our services have been deemed non-essential. I beg to differ! The church of Jesus Christ has *always* been essential. We need to worship the Lord, and we need to connect with one another during the journey of life. God *designed* us for these things.

Three items on the immediate horizon can help with this **new dawn of reconnection**. First, we have a team working on the new church directory, merging the listings of the former Zion Myerstown and First Lebanon congregations. When it's released, we can use the new directory to help stay in touch with each other until everyone can reassemble for worship and fellowship events in full confidence that they will be safe. Second, we're presently putting together a new livestreaming service for better audiovisual quality, as well as a new church website and social media presence in which our members can interact with each other—at least online. We hope to have these new systems up and running in the next few months. And third, Holy Week 2021 is upon us.

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Holy Week can be one of the most significant times of a church's worship year. During these special days, we clear our calendar to focus exclusively on the events of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, which are at the very heart of our Christian faith. Our attention during this special week is directed toward the person and work of Jesus Christ as the triumphant yet humble King (Palm Sunday), the Servant of God and Mediator of the New Covenant (Maundy Thursday), the Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World (Good Friday), and *Christus Victor*—the Risen Savior of the Human Race (Easter Sunday).

Historically, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday have all been regarded as the Great Triduum ("Three Great Days"), yet one single, continuous worship service. Therefore, the benediction is not typically spoken until the conclusion of the Easter Sunday worship service. Our purpose in these gatherings is to exalt and honor the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and remember his amazing grace to us. In the words of John the Baptist, "He must increase, and I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Included in this mailing is a brochure containing all the Holy Week services and activities available to us this year. Of special note is the continental breakfast on Easter Sunday morning in lieu of Sunday school classes. We envision of time of "distanced fellowship" with a small team serving the breakfast items for the sake of safety. (And if I don't get my hands in the stash, we'll even have some candy for the kids!) Not only will our Sunday school teachers get a well-deserved break, we'll have an opportunity to see and talk to each other, even if distanced.

If you would like to attend the Maundy Thursday and/or Good Friday services in person but are reluctant to drive at night, please let us know, as we are putting together an escort service to help with transportation. Just call or send me an email, and we'll arrange for your pickup and safe return on those nights.

The Apostle Peter wrote that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead "has given us new birth into a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). After his own dark night of the soul—featuring three denials of Christ and a time of bitter weeping in isolation—he was especially sensitive to the significance of that first Easter Sunday. Because of the resurrection, he could live again. He could hope again. So can we.

I look forward to reconnecting whenever you feel safe enough to do so. Until then, let's connect with each other as best we can online or by phone, celebrating the great truth that guarantees all will be well in the end—Christ is risen indeed.

Grace,

Pastor Tim Valentino