



Grace Notes

2825 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94403

Grace Lutheran Church & School

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COVID-19, PROTESTS, SCHOOL CLOSING, AND THE PHASED RE-OPENING OF WORSHIP

A lot of disturbing things have happened since my last Grace Notes article in early May, and even the little bit of good news must be hedged with warnings.

First, as of today (June 7th), COVID-19 has caused 112,000 deaths in the USA and 393,000 deaths in the world total. Isn't it strange that the USA, which supposedly has the best medical care in the world, now has 1/3rd of the total deaths in the world? What does this mean? I don't know. Medical and disease experts will have to tell us once this has all passed.

Second, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd of Minneapolis was killed during a police arrest. This has resulted in an eruption of protests around the country, even in other countries, over the issues of racism, police brutality, the "system," etc. But it has also been accompanied by riots, arson, and significant cases of looting. For example, on May 31st, a group of eight women armed with sledgehammers broke into Geoffrey's Diamonds & Goldsmith in the neighboring town of San Carlos, costing the business as much as \$100,000 in damages and stolen merchandise. In response to the widespread looting, many cities have been under curfew and many businesses in San Mateo County and other Bay Area counties have boarded up their windows and doors.

What should we think about the Floyd case, protests, looting, racism, etc.? Our synodical president, the Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, has issued a very fine statement that is in keeping with our theology and with previous synodical resolutions and statements on the subject of racism

here: <https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/statement-on-the-death-of-george-floyd-and-the-ensuing-riots> Other resources from our synod on the subject can be found

here: <https://www.lcms.org/social-issues/racism>

Let me add two things from my own areas of study over the years. First, the source of racism in modern Western societies is not Christian theology or ethics, but rather "scientific racism"

(see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_racism). Second, one of the leading neo-Marxist philosophers of the twentieth-century, Jürgen Habermas, has stated that: “Universalistic egalitarianism . . . is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. . . .Up to this very day there is no alternative to it”

(see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jürgen_Habermas#Religious_dialogue). Even a neo-Marxist must admit that Christian ideals and ethics do not contribute to racism but are rather antithetical to it. I hardly need to remind you that Christians often fall far short of their ideals and ethics, for which they need to repent and to apologize to those whom they have hurt.

Third, the COVID-19 virus not only has killed lots of people, it has also affected our school at Grace. Although Mr. Brauer and our teachers made a very successful transition to online learning in March, numerous families left the school, and all our recruitment efforts for the next year were stymied. On May 30, 2020, our Voters’ Assembly met via ZOOM to discuss the future of Grace Lutheran School. The minutes from the meeting report that the Grace School Board had recommended on April 29, 2020 to close the school, which was 100% due to financial matters. On May 18, the Planning Council voted in agreement with the recommendation. After a long and difficult discussion, the voters decided to close the school. If you would like to read the entire minutes, you may contact our church office or Sue Bethke, our corporate Secretary.

This is the place to thank all who have supported Grace Lutheran School with their time, talents, and treasure. We could not have accomplished this ministry and mission without your help. May our Lord bless you for that work! I personally want to thank Mr. Fred Brauer and all our teachers and staff for their efforts to offer a Lutheran education to children and young people in our community. Your students will never forget you, and your witness of Christian love, and to the Gospel, will always be with your students. We look forward to having a celebration of Mr. Brauer’s ministry as he enters retirement—but will have to wait for that until it is safe to gather again.

If you missed the online graduation ceremonies for our six eighth graders, you may ask our Administrative Assistant, Mrs. Rebecca Young (email = ryoung@glcssm.org), for a hyperlink to the video on YouTube. It is a little over one hour long. We wish our graduates success in their future education and endeavors!

If you have friends or relatives looking for an LCMS Lutheran school in the San Francisco Bay Area, these are the schools that are still open: Saint Philip in Dublin; Prince of Peace in Fremont; Our Savior in Livermore; Saint John in Napa; Redeemer in Redwood City; and West Portal (2 campuses) and Zion in San Francisco.

There is some light at the “end of the tunnel,” but no BIG HOORAY. As of June 1st, the San Mateo Public Health loosened its restrictions on religious gatherings to be in alignment with the State orders. You will be receiving notices from me very soon about when and how we will be re-opening for worship. Watch for that in your email and postal mail. We will follow all state and country orders, regulations, etc. for the safety of our members and the public. But here are the beginnings of the warnings:

From AARP: The Magazine 63 no. 4A, p. 1 “The [COVID-19] virus carries much greater risks for older people. It drives more hospitalizations for us [older folks] and turns fatal with tragic frequency. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 8 out of 10 of the COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have been in adults 65 and older.”

From Dr. Scott Morrow, San Mateo Public Health Officer, May 29, 2020 letter to San Mateo Clergy, “I don’t think it is safe or wise to have gatherings of any size right now. It is especially unsafe for people over the age of 50 and folks who have chronic medical conditions to gather. Gathering increases their risk of contracting the virus and becoming very sick or dying. I do not think it is a good idea, even with protections in place, to have gatherings of people who do not belong to the same household. I do not recommend you proceed with these types of gatherings [including worship services] at this time. **I particularly recommend that people over the age of 50 and folks who have chronic medical conditions NOT BE ALLOWED to attend these type of gatherings.** There have been numerous reports of virus transmission in church/mosque/synagogues/temples/house of worship settings. **Singing, a mainstay of many religious services, while very comforting and healing, is about the best way you could think of to spread the virus far and wide and infect many. Chanting and recitation should also be avoided.**”

I have shared with our elders, and with a committee of Grace officers, all the documents that contain health orders, regulations, and guidelines that pertain to the re-opening of worship services. I have done my due diligence, and now it is up to our officers to make decisions in these matters. I cannot say in advance what our Grace officers will decide but let me **highly discourage anyone “age 50**

or older” or “anyone with chronic medical conditions” from attending worship services at the present time. I am discouraging these people from attending in compliance with San Mateo Health Order No. c19-5e – Appendix C-1 (REVISED), effective June 1, 2020, and because I care about your health and welfare.

Yours in Christ, Pastor Martin R. Noland

Grace Lutheran Church, San Mateo, CA