

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." –Matthew 25:40

June 30, 2020

Dear SPUMC Members & Friends,

None of us could have predicted when the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic reached Wisconsin in March that nearly four months later, we would still not be able to safely gather in our church buildings for in-person worship. Through the weeks of the "Safer at Home" order and now the phased reopening of our communities and state, we have continued to be the Church as the body of Christ and found creative ways to continue to serve God and our neighbors and to worship together.

From the beginning of the pandemic, our church staff and leadership have exercised an abundance of caution while following safety guidelines based on science and best practices that have come from the national Center for Disease Control (CDC), our state and local elected leadership and our United Methodist Conference leadership. The one thing we have learned about the Coronavirus is how much we don't know. We must respect how quickly this virus can spread and the devastating results of the virus for many people.

As the Pandemic Management Team, made up of members of our elected Leadership Board, we have made the difficult decision to continue to hold back before returning to in-person worship in our church sanctuary.

We continue to live with multiple restrictions on mass public gatherings in order to keep one another safe. Returning to in-person worship would look very different than the last time we gathered on March 8th.

- The total number of people, including worship leaders and volunteers would be limited to 50 during Phase 2 and 100 during Phase 3, but with needed 6-foot distance.
- A system for signing up to come to worship would need to be implemented.
- Temperature checks and question screening would take place at the church entrance.
- Face masks would be required to be worn.
- No hugging or handshaking.
- No congregational singing; no choirs or praise teams; no congregational speaking for liturgy such as the Lord's Prayer.
- No passing of offering plates or friendship pads.
- No hymnals, song books, envelopes or prayer cards in the pew pockets.
- No children coming forward for children's time. No nursery care or children's church.
- No Communion.
- Leaving the building immediately after worship would be required.
- No fellowship time.
- A limited number of restrooms would be available for use.
- Only one Sunday service would be offered at first in order to allow adequate cleaning.

Given all these necessary restrictions for in-person worship and given the congregational surveys, which overwhelmingly supported moving forward with great caution until a vaccine is found; and given the fact that we are able to provide quality online worship, it has been decided to wait for returning to in-person worship until a time when all these restrictions would not be necessary. No specific return date has been set. We will continue to monitor the spread of the virus.

The exciting news is that we have made the decision to begin a gradual reopening of the church building the week of July 13th. We will have small group gatherings and meetings inside or outside the building if they can be done safely following the necessary restrictions of temperature checks and screening at the door, wearing masks and social distancing while in the church building or on the church grounds. We will keep group gatherings to 10-12 people to start and increase size as we are able to do safely. All group gatherings, either inside the church or outside on the church grounds will need to be scheduled through the church office. Children and youth ministry activities will be added as it is safe to do so.

Our church staff will work on creating and offering options for in-person gatherings of small groups following necessary protocols and also continue the online gatherings and services.

Allowing outside user groups back into the church building will not happen until at least September and then on a limited and individual basis, following all safety precautions. Exceptions will be the Blood Drive and U.S. elections that are scheduled and will be following their own and our protocols.

As we continue navigating something none of us has ever experienced, we are blessed with meaningful worship online through our church website and on our KSUN-12 local TV channel. And we continue to share in many opportunities to be the Church.

Thank you for your prayers, your patience and your continued stewardship that supports our ministry together as we make decisions that have no easy answers.

It is good to be the Church,

Pandemic Management Team: Rev. Jenny Arneson; Paul Esser, Leadership Board co-chair; Donna Cole, Leadership Board co-chair; Cheri Hiller, Staff Parish Relations chair; Sarah Bolen, Finance/Stewardship chair; Lisa Wink, Church Treasurer.