

June 2, 2020

Greetings faithful Mediapolis UMC family! I continue to pray for you during our time apart and am awaiting the day we will all be together through in-person worship again. We have begun steps to see that day as a reality by planning our first in-person worship event since the rise of the pandemic.

In this letter, you will find our plan for re-entry, along with guidelines and recommendations for a safe and practical worship experience. This will be a phased-in approach. We will not be at the level of involvement we were in before the pandemic, but we will re-evaluate on a regular basis to include those familiar worship experiences we all long for.

Our target date is June 7<sup>th</sup> for our first in-person worship service. We will worship together in the combined space of the sanctuary and the Wesley Room. Entrances to use are the double doors of the Sanctuary, and the single door at the center of the South side of the building. Unless you are part of the staff or worship team, please use these two entrances only. We still have social distancing in place, so please leave at least 6 feet of distance from the family ahead of you while entering the building.

It is strongly encouraged to wear a mask at least while entering and exiting the building, especially if the 6-foot distance cannot be kept. Inside, it is encouraged to continue wearing a mask if possible, and we will work hard to provide you with one homemade mask for worship use. You'll find these masks being provided by an usher at each entrance. Please keep this mask and use it for worship on a weekly basis.

Accessible areas of the building will include the Sanctuary, Wesley Room, upstairs restrooms, and nursery room. Nursery services will not be provided, but the room will be available if a parent needs to take their child to a quiet room. There will not be toys, but the worship service will be aired on the TV. Please reserve this room for a quiet room. Please refrain from using any other portions of the building.

When you enter the building for worship, you will find a station in the Sanctuary and Wesley Room that has hand sanitizer and an offering box. Please be encouraged to give your offering during entering or exiting at this station, or you can continue with online giving if you are more comfortable with that method. Near this station, you will find a list of the most critical recommendations while we are together. This includes a reminder to stay at home if you are ill, or if you have come in contact with anyone who is ill, or if you show any symptoms of the Covid-19 infection such as fever or cough.

We understand there are allergies, so if you have a seasonal cough or sneeze, please just be sure it does not accompany a fever. We will give verbal reminders that some of us have these seasonal responses.

In the Sanctuary, you will see clearly marked pews for seating. Please refrain from sitting in cordoned off pews. Pews will be marked with 6 ft increments, so be sure to allow 6 feet between families or individuals. If you have multiple members of your family present, please gather on the same pew, as long as you are 6 feet away from the next family.

In the Wesley Room, chairs will be placed in 6 ft increments. If you would like to gather with your immediate family, you can bring the chairs together in that particular row as long as you are 6 feet away from the next family. The TV in the Wesley Room will be used for additional viewing for the front rows.

We will not provide paper bulletins, so please be sure to have something to jot down pertinent information from the announcements on the screen as we prepare to start worship. We will also have reminders posted with guidelines for safe practices, and perhaps can use these spaces to also provide important items you would normally find in the bulletin.

Our initial services will have two worship songs, provided by a worship team of two people. The worship team will be positioned at least 15 feet away from the nearest family, and they will provide our worship music. There are still many unknowns with how far air travels during singing, so it is strongly encouraged to allow the worship team to be our singing voices while we assess more data (this is one of those phased-in approaches I was speaking of).

It is our hope that we will be able to return to full congregational singing, but we want to take things at a safe level of involvement. We will still include words on the screen with lyrics, but hymnals and pew bibles will not be present.

We will not have a greeting time with hugs or handshakes, but we will take a few moments for smiles and waves as we greet one another in this fashion. Please remain seated during these moments.

While mask use is encouraged, it has been recommended that the sermon is not given behind a mask. I am sure you will appreciate being able to hear the message without it being muffled, and I will be sure to place the pulpit at a safe distance during the message. I will wear a mask during the time I am not preaching. It is also highly recommended to refrain from verbal unison prayer. During the Lord's Prayer, please be encouraged to pray silently, or at a low voice.

We will evaluate the possibility of Holy Communion together, but it will be July at the earliest.

As we wrap up our time together, we will all exit after the benediction. This will be done in phases, and we will release one section at a time. Again, please allow 6 feet of space between you and the family in front of you and wear a mask as you exit the building. We cannot gather in groups during this time; we must all exit the building.

Between worship services on a weekly basis we will sanitize chairs, doorknobs, light switches, microphones, restrooms, etc. so we can be prepared for the next worship event. Throughout the week there will be no small group gatherings (Sunday School, ministry events, etc.) without expressed permission through the Administrative Council board. There will be no family gatherings, graduation parties, etc. within the building until it is deemed OK through the board. Again, we want to get back to these things, but we must approach carefully as we begin our time together again, and we want to make sure our cleaning procedure is done in a safe manner and our custodian is safe as well.

\*\*\* If any of the above gives you a sense of anxiety, please be encouraged to continue in online worship. If the notion of people not wearing masks is a concern, if not singing will feel too awkward, if you are in the at-risk category, please know that we will keep the online service available. In addition, I will broadcast the service over 87.9 FM. There will be about a 2-block radius from Mediapolis UMC that you will be able to receive signal. If you can't join us online or in person, you can find a parking place close to the church and tune into service on a weekly basis in this manner.

Again, my prayers continue for each of you. In whatever way you continue with worship service, we so appreciate your prayers for this church and the people here we call family. We are making it through this with God's strength, and it is in that strength we trust God is holding us together.

In Christ,

Pastor Bruce