

June 16, 2020

Dear Friends,

Over the past few months, COVID-19 has disrupted our lives in so many ways. Canceling in-person church activities has been one of the hardest changes for us. As new cases in the Quad Cities slowly decrease, we are finally able to make plans for the safe reopening of our building. We've attached our church's reopening policy, so that everyone can prepare for our future together.

This policy has been written with careful discussion from our Pandemic Response Team made up of staff, elders, and congregational members. We discussed how reopening our building will affect people with health concerns, the community we serve in mission, and our cleaning staff. Our team reviewed several guidelines, and agreed to base this policy on guidance from an epidemiologist. The team is made up of: Pastors Mark Galbraith and Katie Styrt, Matt Bishop, Darren Long, Pam Paulsen, Jim Middleton, Heather Calvert, Dr. Andy Edwards, RuthAnn Tobey Brown, and Kristine Oswald. Their hard work will continue as we work out the nuts and bolts of what it means to gather safely.

We will not summarize the policy - it's not too long, and you should read it yourselves. However, we want to be clear that it doesn't include dates for reopening. Instead, the church will begin to resume in-person activities as soon as the COVID-19 rate in our metro area is low enough for us to gather. As new cases continue to decrease, we'll continue to loosen our restrictions. Our church's happiness will be directly tied to the health of our community, which should always be true. If a second wave of deaths or infections occurs, we'll have to tighten our safety guidelines as we mourn those who are suffering. This means that in-person church activities will look different from month to month, but always have the end goal of keeping our church family as safe as possible. Please be sure to check the church website, Facebook page, or call the office to keep updated.

As Christians, we are committed to loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. COVID-19 has made the Golden Rule a tangible, conscious spiritual practice in new ways. Because we love our neighbors, we will wear face coverings until the infection rate lowers. Because we love our congregation, we will stay distanced from each other even in person. It will take work to build up these habits, but the annoyance of wearing masks and distancing is tiny next to the joy of caring for each other. We can adapt to this "new normal" together.

Friends, it will be a long time before church looks or sounds like it did in the past. Many people may continue to stay at home out of safety concerns, and there will be online options for them. However, our church has never stopped being a community of people who love God and each other. We have found new ways to stay connected over these past few months. The creativity and dedication you have already shown will continue to guide us through our reopening process. With God's help, we will have the patience and unselfishness needed for the months ahead. Please feel free to reach out to any of us on the Pandemic Response Team to ask questions. We are so, so excited to prepare for seeing you all in person again.

Peace,

Pastors Mark Galbraith and Katie Styrt.