

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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June 5, 2020

Dear Friends,

Our nation continues to experience the pain and suffering that comes from both the Covid-19 pandemic and the long-standing pandemic of racism and injustice. These are difficult times and can feel even harder when we do not have the opportunity to gather together to pray, share, and listen to one another in person.

In the midst of all this, I wanted to continue to update you about resources that may be helpful for local churches as we contemplate re-engaging with activities and "in-person" worship services in our buildings.

Guidance for starting "In-Person" Worship Services

You have probably seen a number of resources and recommendations coming from a variety of people and organizations. We have not sent out these kinds of resources in the Michigan Conference yet. Let me briefly explain why that is the case and what we hope to do in the very near future.

Recommendations from the Michigan Conference, UCC

We have two major commitments when it comes to recommending steps or guidelines for local churches to return to "in-person" activities and worship services: (1) Does the information come from health and scientific authorities with a process to update recommendations as new facts or insights are gained? (2) Is the information specific to Michigan and our local settings?

Because this is not our area of expertise, the virus is so contagious, and the effect on our communities can be so devastating, it is essential that the information we use and the steps we take to ensure the health of our people are based on the best information we can provide.

To that end...

Next Steps

Governor's "Re-Opening" Workgroups

I have been asked to serve on the Governor's Re-Opening Workgroup, specifically focusing on faith communities and community events. This work is now in the hands of a small "writing group" and we hope that the information will be available within the next couple weeks. I have encouraged the group to create guidelines that are (1) based on the Governor's "Michigan Safe Start Plan" https://www.michigan.gov/documents/whitmer/MI_SAFE_START_PLAN_689875_7.pdf

(2) Reviewed and supported by the science and public health community, and (3) updated as new information and facts are learned.

When this resource is completed, we will make sure it is widely distributed across our Conference. Although the information may be clearer at that point, I do not expect it will be easier. Maintaining an obsessive consistency in cleaning, disinfecting, social distancing, and all the other steps in the guidelines are essential and it will be easy to grow lax.

More Resources

We will continue to look for resources that can be helpful to our Conference and encourage you to check our website (COVID-19 Resources): [HERE](#)

Final Reflections

Friends let me be honest, although resources are going to be available, and there will be possibilities of experiencing some kind of activities and/or worship services at our church buildings, I do not expect our churches will return to anything close to “pre-pandemic normal” until a vaccine is created and distributed. I know this may seem shocking but it is important for us to come to terms with this very real possibility.

I expect this will create some tensions in local churches because there will be a few people pushing for churches to move faster and get back to “what we did before.” While I understand the impulse of those sisters and brothers, I also want to share a caution with them. A growing sense of discomfort and impatience does not equate to God’s voice. Some of the greatest saints in our communities are the very people most vulnerable to Covid-19 and it is part of our value of “Extravagant Welcome” that all people feel safe and comfortable in our faith communities. The decision to return to “in-person” services should be taken up in prayer, guided by the best science, and discerned by the entire congregation.

Friends this is a time for patience and understanding. We could very well experience an up-tick in the number of cases of Covid-19 at any point, and if that happens, we will likely see another period of quarantine. I encourage all of us to give an extra measure of grace to one another and to commit to seeing how and where God is moving in the midst of all this change. Maybe “When?” is not the best question for us. Maybe “What?” and “How?” are the questions that can help us live faithfully in these times.

I so appreciate the hearts of our people. We are a restless crew. That’s ok. May we always be sensitive enough to be stirred by God’s Spirit, even if it unsettles us and puts us on a new path.

Thank you for your faithfulness and patience during this time. We will work very hard to get you the best information we can.

Peace be with you.

Phil

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