

September 15, 2020

Hello TCC family and friends,

It's been so wonderful for all of us to meet outdoors on Sunday mornings recently. We plan to continue through early October so we can enjoy autumn to the fullest. Weather permitting of course! We've done well remembering our masks and chairs, so it's quite likely a blanket to wrap up in would also be manageable.

Therefore, you might already be thinking, "once it gets chilly, let's just go inside; how dangerous could it be in the sanctuary." On the other hand, we have to think about who we are: we're an older congregation and thus many of us are at risk. In MA groups larger than 25 persons currently are not allowed. Churches are second only to restaurants as places for contracting Covid-19.

The United Church of Christ has an extensive set of guidelines for reopening. In total there are four documents and a total of 30 pages. (There are a few more documents, but these relate to us.)

So for the sake of brevity here are some things to consider.

Create a Covid 19 task force (ministry team) to be responsible for all aspects of leadership and oversight.

Complying with local health officials and insurance companies.

Comply with masking, distancing, temperatures etc. and dealing with non-compliance. Provide masks, hand sanitizers (and no-touch dispensers), trash bins etc.

Advance registering for attending services and maintaining contact information for 1 year (for each service).

Keeping all members informed about attendance limits, and guidelines.

Limiting use of facility (seating, entry and exit, bathrooms). Stripping the sanctuary of porous materials (altar cloth, pew cushions, etc).

Thorough cleaning and sanitizing of all areas immediately following use. Volunteers would need to be trained. If more than one service is held the building would need to be sanitized between the services.

Limit of attendance (maximum 25, if building can meet all standards).

Provide alternative live-streaming of services. Requires new equipment and a trained user.

Heightened responsibilities of ushers and greeters to monitor compliance, etc.

Person to person contact is not permitted (hand shaking, passing of the peace, etc).

Hymnals and Bibles are to be removed from the pews.

No bulletins. The preferred method is to use a projection system.

No fellowship time. People should exit promptly after the service.

Have plans ready if worship leader(s) become ill. This includes continued services, but also providing for the needs of the leaders (finances, time, etc

#### In worship:

No microphones are to be shared.

Announcements should be sent (via email) ahead of the service and only the worship leader announces them. Avoid hand written notes, as it spreads germs.

Greeting is limited to verbal exchanges, with mask of course. (No hand shaking, hugs, passing of the peace, etc).

Instrumental music is acceptable, but no wind instruments should be used. Musicians need to be 6 feet from other worship leaders.

No singing is permitted. (The spread and atomizing of breath increase the risk of contact significantly). This includes hymns, choir and soloists.

No unison prayers should be spoken by the congregation (including the Lord's Prayer). The pastor or liturgist may share this responsibility, but must maintain social distance and be masked.

Prayer requests may be given from pews. No microphone is to be used and speaker must wear mask while speaking.

Sermons are to be delivered from the pulpit. Pastors may remove their mask if needed to be heard clearly. Return to using the mask as soon as possible.

Offering plates may be set near the entrance or exit and people. On-line giving is best practice.

No Communion should be offered during the pandemic.

The full list is extensive and may seem unnecessarily burdensome. However, epidemiologists are anticipating a difficult fall, with an additional 100,000 deaths by the end of the year. And currently, there are currently 37, 000 new cases each week in the US.

Given the current 'best practices' and our church's needs when the weather becomes too cold for outdoor worship we will hold on-line worship through the winter. Church leadership will continue to monitor the situation and reconsider in-person gatherings at the beginning of the year. Thank you for your understanding, patience, faithfulness, and prayers.

In faith, hope and love,

Pastor Rosemary and the Executive Committee