

Light at the End of the Tunnel

Due to the current rise in Covid-19 infections across our state, Aledo UMC will continue to suspend in-person worship through the month of January. This action is taken in response to a December 9 letter issued by Bishop Frank Beard of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. This follows a November letter from our Bishop in which he wrote, “I am instructing our churches not to meet for indoor worship for the next four weeks” (November 22 through December 13). That letter went on to say that on December 9, he and the cabinet would decide how churches should proceed thereafter.

On Wednesday, December 9, Bishop Beard issued that letter, stating, “I encourage pastors and laity to continue to provide virtual worship...” and “I strongly recommend that pastors across the IGRC refrain from in-person worship in our church buildings and facilities.”

Now let me digress for a bit. For five years, I was a part-time hospice chaplain for Blessing Hospice in Pike County. One of the reasons I was a hospice chaplain is because Medicare required Blessing Hospice to include spiritual care for its patients. That is because Medicare understood the importance of spiritual care for a variety of reasons.

I am fully aware of the ongoing harmful impact of this pandemic. Much has been cited concerning its harmful effect on the economy, including the loss of jobs and businesses. Much has also been cited concerning its harmful effect on mental health. Unfortunately, not as much as been cited about the harmful effect on the spiritual lives of people. Many have argued for churches to be reopened because of the financial harm they are experiencing, and while that is true for many, many churches, I believe that it is more important for churches to reopen for the spiritual well-being of people.

With that in mind, I’ve noticed a change in tenor in Bishop Beard’s letters. In November, we pastors were *instructed* not to meet for indoor worship. That’s a clear and strong directive. However, his December 9 letter *recommends* that we refrain from in-person worship and *encourages* us to continue virtual worship. That’s a bit more flexible. Nonetheless, Aledo UMC will stick to virtual worship through January with one service streamed live on Facebook at 9:15 am and broadcast weekly on WRMJ Radio. However, as pastor, I am reserving the right to invite a limited number of persons to attend our 9:15 am worship service. Worshippers will be required to wear a mask and socially distance themselves from others. For those of you who suspect that I might be playing favorites, please know that you will be right. I will be playing favorites. But please also know that I have over 500 favorites living in Mercer County. Unfortunately, I can’t invite them all.

If you can possibly participate in our worship through Facebook or WRMJ, please continue doing so. But if you would like to be considered for an invitation, please contact me.

I pray that once we get past Christmas and traveling dies down, we will be able to resume limited in-person worship in February. If that happens, we will likely resume three services because it better facilitates social distancing. I will keep you posted.

Blessings,
Pastor Dave