

Hi friends,

Now that we are in the new year, we can take a bit of a breath and move into the regular pattern of worship and life together! I've attached a letter from Jill Berg, the chair of our Spiritual Leadership team. I want to thank her for addressing how we as a church can be addressing the uncertainty of the situations we are in, and our ability to provide our normal programming.

I want to remind you of a few things first:

SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday at 10:30 am, we will be having a special worship service. This Sunday marks the celebration of the Baptism of our Lord. I want to invite you to have a basin of water available towards the end of the service if you would like to participate in the liturgy of reaffirming our baptism vows! Join us on our YouTube channel this Sunday. Follow this link and it will take you there. <https://www.youtube.com/PiratesoftheColumbia>.

VIRTUAL ½ HOUR COFFEE HOUR

Each Sunday at 11:30am

Join us at 11:30 am after our Sunday Worship Service for an open Zoom format to connect and share a cup of coffee with one another. After our Sunday Worship Service, we will have an open Zoom conference for people to stop in and see each other face to face and just reconnect with one another. Feel free to stop in for a few minutes, or for the whole half hour and see who needs a haircut and say hello to friends. Follow this Zoom link at 11:30 am Sunday Morning to log in. <https://greaternw.zoom.us/j/92776382874> - Meeting ID: 927 7638 2874.

I am amazed at the resiliency of our church in this most difficult time, without the opportunity to meet in person. Though we are not meeting to worship in person together, our focus on loving God and loving our neighbor has not diminished. In late March Council determined that Soul Soup was an essential service to our community and Bob Kelly and his team quickly adapted to the new sanitation and distancing guidelines. We have continued to serve meals to the neediest of our community throughout this pandemic. Throughout the summer our youth director and Sunday school assistant were creative on how to connect with the kids of our church and community with a successful VBS backpack program. In light of our continued limitations on gatherings our UMW ladies got creative to provide a safe alternative to our annual Holly Daze with a drive through event. Our Lay Shepherds continued to reach out to those among us who are feeling most isolated at this time. So many more have volunteered to reach out via phone calls and we now provide a DVD of services for those not able to view an online worship. All the while our worship team and Pastor Mark has been creating weekly worship services that are gathering views from around our state and beyond. We have texted and emailed our hellos on Sunday mornings. Our life together may feel like it on pause, but it is not.

The church council met recently to discuss the state of the pandemic in our local area and our plans to reopen for in person worship. As this letter is being written the cases of COVID 19 in our area continue to climb without sign of relief. We all thought this would be behind us by now. Our staff has been exerting energy on tracking where our community is with regards to COVID cases, local, state and UMC conference regulations in order to determine what the worship or programs could look like each week. Working each week with this uncertainty has been draining. With this in mind, the Leadership council and Pastor Mark unanimously agree that we will place our focus on improving the programs we CAN provide during this time of restricted gathering. With that being said we have moved our expected date to re-open for in person worship out until Easter 2021. We want to support our staff and leadership efforts to continue to provide quality online worship experience and meaningful ways to connect with each other until we can meet again. This decision was made with the understanding that if circumstances change significantly, as seen by significant improvement in our community transmission of COVID and/or the opportunity for a widely accessible vaccine, we can revisit the timeline for reopening for in person worship and programs.

Yes, things are quite different, and we need to be creative in thinking of ways to worship, grow in our faith and connect with each other and community. BUT we are doing just that. We are not limited to the walls of our church building. We ARE the church, and we will carry on, loving God and loving our neighbors.

To God be the Glory,

Jill Berg,
Lay Leader/ Council Chair

Mark McMurray
Pastor