

July 9, 2020

Church Re-Entry Update

Dear First United Methodist Friends,

The following is an update on the work of the Re-entry Task Force. By way of reminder, at a special meeting on May 11th, FUMC Church Council approved the formation of the Task Force for Re-entry and Response to the Pandemic (the "Re-Entry Task Force"), including clergy, staff and lay members to collaborate and guide our decision making and activities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Task Force has met weekly since mid-May and will provide frequent updates to provide visibility into ongoing decisions and activities. Members of the Task Force are: Pastor Julie Kline, Pastor Keith Treman, Ruth LaMachia, Jackie Stilger, Julia Librizzi, Jonathan Richardson, Carol Hodges, Derek Wheaton, Andy Vorbrich, Terri Kinzy, Christopher Bovid, Tom Schaberg, Julie Meyers, Vickie Winfield and Karen Hassevoort (Pastor Steve Charnley was formerly a member). Please do not hesitate to reach out to any member of the Task Force with questions.

ALL-CHURCH SURVEY

One of the first things that the Task Force did was to conduct a congregational survey and we were very pleased to receive several hundred responses to the brief survey questions. The overwhelming response was that on-line worship met or exceeded expectations and respondents felt that we should not rush our decisions or actions in response to the pandemic—we should proceed gradually with appropriate care and consideration in keeping everyone safe. Over 2/3 of the respondents indicated that they considered themselves in the “at-risk” group. A limited number of respondents indicated that they were ready to return to worship at FUMC and we certainly appreciate and acknowledge the sentiments offered with love for each other and the fellowship and work of the church. It is difficult to be physically isolated from family and friends, including our church family. We miss being at FUMC and the comfort and joy that we experience there and look forward expectantly to the time when we will be there to worship together.

DELAYING IN-PERSON WORSHIP

The reality is that the Task Force does not foresee that in-person worship at FUMC will resume for some time to come, most likely until there is a vaccine for the virus and it has been widely administered. Our love and concern for each other is too great to take any unnecessary risks in resuming in-person worship at the church. We know that we will continue to be blessed immensely by the inspiration, creativity, love and hard work that the clergy and staff continue to bring to on-line worship! (Can we get an “AMEN!”) Please continue to express your love, support and appreciation to them often.

GRADUAL RESPONSE

For context, the Task Force considers that FUMC’s response will be measured and gradual and will pass through several phases which can be characterized as follows:

- Phase 0: Complete shutdown of FUMC
- Phase 1: Limited FUMC staff at church as needed to ensure critical functions are met

- Phase 2: Limited FUMC ministries resume at church that cannot function remotely
- Phase 3: Expanded FUMC staff on-site and additional ministries resume that cannot function remotely
- Phase 4: FUMC is open for in-person worship
- Phase 5: Additional ministries resume in-person activities at FUMC as re-entry plans are presented and approved

PROTOCOLS

The Task Force has established protocols for limited staff and others entry to FUMC, including a sign in and out log, required responses to health screening questions, social distancing requirements and a mandate of mask wearing (unless in an enclosed individual office or engaging in worship recording activities with appropriate distancing observed). The Task Force also established that no in-person activities by any persons or groups will be allowed to resume at FUMC until an appropriate plan has been developed by the group and approved by the Task Force and Church Council.

The Task Force developed a template for a Re-entry Plan (which includes the requirements for the items that must be addressed in each group's plan) and has worked with First Care and the Kids' Adventure Program ("KAP"), two ministries that need access to FUMC to carry out their mission, to work through plan preparation and approval. On the Task Force's recommendation, Church Council approved the re-entry plans for these two groups. First Care reopened on June 22 (limited enrollment currently) and the KAP program uses the parlor and copy area one day a week to prepare materials for distribution to kids who are participating in the program. The Task Force plans to monitor these activities and will then discuss the possibility of additional staff presence and activity at FUMC and the status of activities by several groups that may face unique challenges in conducting their ministries remotely, such as JFON, YANA and HON. (Our food pantry has indicated that they will not seek to reopen for the foreseeable future as needs are being met through other arrangements at this time.)

GUIDELINES FROM OTHERS

At this time, we cannot provide a definitive date by which any specific in-person activities will be approved to resume at FUMC. Protecting the health and safety of all those entering FUMC is our greatest concern in compliance with requirements and guidelines from the CDC, Governor Whitmer, Bishop Bard, any other applicable regulatory authority and FUMC's specific requirements.

As we continue to discern and plan our steps moving forward, we realize we will have many challenges. We are operating with a great deal of uncertainty about both the present and future, with on-going changes in conditions and updates in medical and scientific information. We will work and plan with the confidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives individually and as a faith community. God is good and we will create ways to be the church in a world that yearns and watches for signs of hope.