

April 9, 2021

Dear Friends,

I hope you were blessed by Holy Week and our glorious Easter celebration. As we traveled through Holy Week, I found the collaborative work of our worship planners and leaders to be deeply sacred. I was overjoyed with the majesty of Easter morning, even as we worshipped online. I was also profoundly touched in the creating of sacred rituals in our church yard under the cross that was first draped in the liturgical colors of purple, to black, to white, proclaiming "He is risen indeed!" In these continuing times of uncertainty, I was reassured that we, as a faith community, are grounding ourselves in a love that will not let us go, and we are sharing the joy of this love with all who will join us.

Several of you have been asking, "What is next and when can we begin to worship in person?" We remain focused on loving our neighbor by protecting our church kindred and our greater community. We continue to rely on data and recommendations from the state and from our denominational leadership to make careful and wise decisions.

We do not have an exact timeline for how things will unfold. However, conversations are ongoing. The situation in Michigan and around the nation is fluid and ever-changing. Many are getting vaccinated. Praise God! Yet our case numbers are increasing and the current risk level for Michigan is at its highest <https://www.mistartmap.info/>. The statewide overview shows the positive test rate is up 224% since the previous low on February 19. Positivity (11.3%) has increased for five weeks and 8.1% of inpatient beds in Michigan are occupied by patients with COVID-19.

Holy Week was not only a sacred time, but it also provides a model for worship life that we can utilize during this time. It is not yet safe for us to gather in large groups indoors and thus, we are humbly committed to offering the best gift of online worship that we can. We will look for opportunities to gather outside for faith rituals, and soon, we will reinstate our outdoor prayer services. Finding ourselves in the larger sanctuary of God's good creation is the safest way for us to gather as spring is unfolding before us. Praise God! Several small group ministries have begun to meet outdoors and several more are soon to join in the outdoor church. We also continue to offer multiple ministry opportunities online such as Zoom Fellowship, Sunday morning class, Family Foundations, and Godly Play, just to name a few. If you find yourself yearning for fellowship and companionship, please join us. If you need help getting connected, or need help with technology, we have people who are glad to assist (Bob Lane blane@kkzo.com and Derek Wheaton derekwheaton@gmail.com).

Please be assured that the staff of First United Methodist Church have been and will continue to be creative and adaptable, and are seeking ways that we can experience, celebrate, and share God's love. Our collective imaginations as a faith community can show us how to reimagine ways to love and create community. We are called to live worshipful lives, which means we experience this beyond the church building as we navigate our new reality. Church is the people in service and in ministry. Let us be the church. Thank you for your continued prayers and patience as we navigate these uncommon times.

Shalom,



Pastor Julie Kline