

Brothers and Sisters of First UMC, Greetings to you all,

As the coronavirus continues to be a threat to the health and well-being of many of our communities, we ask that you continue to pray for those working tirelessly to protect and care for those feeling its worst effects. We also ask that you pray for our leaders at all levels as they navigate such times with wisdom and grace to protect those under their charge.

The task force for our congregation recently met and discussed at length how to proceed for the next several weeks in light of recent developments. While houses of worship are exempt from Governor Wolf's restrictions meant to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, our conference leadership (Bishop Park and our district superintendent) has encouraged us to do our part in paying heed to these efforts as a means to help in preventing any potential spread among our beloved church family. With this in mind, the task force has agreed that the best course of action for the month of August through Labor Day weekend is to continue to worship in an outdoor setting for in-person worship. Beginning on August 2nd and going through September 6th, we will gather to worship at 10am as we have for the month of July at Jerome King Park's bandshell. The online recording of the children's message and sermon will also continue to be uploaded to YouTube and posted on our website. In the event of inclement weather, all worship services will be conducted online.

We know many of you are eager to return to the building, but we also feel that the best way to hold in-person worship which allows for the most opportune way for individuals and families to feel comfortable in joining us continues to be an outdoor location. This is a powerful reminder that God's church does not require a physical structure to worship in spirit and truth. Rather, we simply need to gather with the right attitude in our hearts and minds to gather in God's powerful presence wherever we may find ourselves.

In 1 Peter 2, we are called to live in such a way that even those who do not know God will praise His name when He returns because of the way we lived. And to use the freedom we have received through Christ to live as God's servants (1 Peter 2:12, 16). Let this be a chance for us all to invite the Holy Spirit to strip away all that hinders our sight which should be set upon the cross which offers healing, mercy, and hope to all who would come to it. Let our lives show God's wisdom "by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom" (James 3:13) and may our words "be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6) so that the world may come to one day join us in praising God's holy name.

In Christ's service to His church among us,

The Reopening Task Force

Pastor Ryan Whisel
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