



April 17, 2020

Dear Richfield UMC,

I pray this week of Easter has been joyous for you and all your loved ones. **He has risen! He has risen, indeed!** As always, you are in my daily prayer life and I miss you all in this challenging time in our church's history when we can't gather in-person due to the Covid-19 pandemic. May we hold each other and our fellow children of God in prayer. Lord, in your mercy! As Gen7, you're an amazing generation, keeping this church strong for Gen8 and beyond. I encourage you to listen to my Easter sermon at <http://youtube.com/richfieldumc> (28:35 mark) for a reminder of all our church has done and overcome throughout the generations and that now, we as Gen7 of Richfield United Methodist Church, will continue on with God's help. Hallelujah!

This statement is an update on where we're at and where we may be headed. In short, this is a liminal, in-between time. We are praying, researching, collaborating, making plans, and making back-up plans. It's still a few weeks before we know about things like the "Stay at Home" order, the Annual Conference session scheduled for June, and when we can return to in-person gatherings. **In this in-between time, we must operate in two simultaneous frames of mind:**

First, we *may* be able to return to in-person worship and other ministries soon. In this scenario, Minnesota's "Stay at Home" order is lifted. Recommendations from the CDC, MDH, and MAC affirm returning to in-person gatherings. And we're confident we are adequately prepared to gather in relative safety. Remember: your safety is our most important concern.

Second, we may be *unable* to return to in-person worship and other ministries for quite some time. It would be a disservice to you if I ignored this very real possibility, no matter how urgently we want to come together again. While it would be my absolute joy to come together in early May, as your pastor I can't attach myself to this desire, nor tell you it's a guarantee. With a large percentage of our active membership in the most-vulnerable demographics, we must be realistic and as it's always been, your safety is our most important concern. Instead I'll say this: even if we cannot gather in-person for many weeks or months to come, **we are still the church, we still love each other and our neighbors, and God will not abandon us in this, friends!**

We are not sitting on our hands! Here's an update on the life of our church and campus:

- Campus is **closed**. Please do **not** come to campus.
- **The office is closed** and paid staff are working remotely except for essential on-campus responsibilities. This continues through the "Stay at Home" order or until we feel safety protocol allows, whichever period is longer. Paid staff are still available [by email](#).
- We are installing **new exterior security doors**. Trustees and Ad Board approved this and it's paid with capital improvement funds. Our vendor had an early window for installation pop up and to keep our campus safe and secure, we have moved forward sooner than anticipated. You'll get more details before we return to in-person gatherings on campus.

- **Caring for Children remains open** in accordance with recommendations from the MDH. As I said on Easter, CFC has been a major source of revenue for the church in recent years. Now our goal is to “break even,” sustain now to come back in a big way later. Your giving helps keep CFC open so essential workers can do their civic duty in these unprecedented times of pandemic, and our families have expressed their gratitude for you. Your financial support helps your church support the great state of Minnesota through this.
- Worship leaders meet online regularly to design **meaningful online worship experiences** both for now and potentially into the coming months ahead.
- We’re working hard to **upgrade our technology** for both live and prerecorded worship as soon as possible. Because of significant costs, we are taking the time to do the research so we can “do it right the first time.” Thank you for your grace in this process.
- We are working on **plans for what returning to in-person gatherings looks like**, including thresholds for safety and what precautions to take. The World Health Organization (WHO) has two helpful documents for this: “Practical Considerations and Recommendations for Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Communities in the Context of Covid-19” and the “Mass Gatherings Decisions Tree.” You can access both of these items online: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19> <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-tree.pdf>
- We continue to monitor guidelines from the CDC, MDH, and MAC. You can see the latest MAC materials here: <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/covid-19-preparedness>
- I have met with an *ad hoc* Executive Team of the Ad Board chair (Sue Restemayer), Lay Leader (Wayne Johnson), and the chairs of SPRC (Jan Kirchner) and Trustees (Jerry Schilling and Nick Dewey) – our two teams required by Discipline – to discuss next steps. This team has been in contact about church operations and I thank you for the trust you put in these elected leaders as we prayerfully consider all our options.

I will announce as soon as possible if we will extend our suspension of in-person worship and in-person gatherings beyond May 10. In this pivotal time, please remember your financial giving to your church and our vital ministry partners **VEAP** (<https://veap.org/donate>) and **Beacon Interfaith Housing** (<https://www.beaconinterfaith.org/donate>). Please connect with each other in worship, in our many online gatherings (Women’s Bible Study, Men’s Bible Study, Brené Brown Study, Children’s Ministry, Youth Ministry, and the “Camp Meetings” variety show), our call care ministry, and simply reach out to one another. **Reaching out matters.**

Finally, I want to personally thank you for your messages of hope and encouragement. It has meant so much to me and my family. May we continue to be family to one another as Gen7 of this amazing church. God’s loving mercy and justice are in this, friends. The Spirit dwells in every heart. And Jesus can redeem anything, even *this* situation. **I am proud to be your pastor!**

In Christ,
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