



April 28, 2020

Dear Richfield UMC,

I write to you in a transition week for Minnesota. We await word on guidance regarding the “Stay at Home” order and hope to make plans for our own return to in-person gatherings soon. May God be with you as we, members of the Body of Christ, are spread out around our great state. In the meantime, your ad hoc Executive Team and I are weighing prayerful, proactive decisions for our next steps and your safety is our most important concern.

**As I announced in worship on Sunday, we are extending our suspension of in-person worship and all in-person gatherings through at least Sunday, May 31.** In this in-between time as we await guidance from the Governor and the Bishop, we want to do what is right for our church. Even if guidance turns out to permit us to meet earlier, we will hold to this timing, which would mean our first in-person worship gathering would be in June *at the earliest*.

I write “at the earliest” because we must be “permitted” and “prepared.” We are using this time to explore what being prepared looks like so we can meet safely. Again, your safety is our most important concern. Going forward, the Executive Team will examine the in-person gathering suspension on a “month-to-month” basis and extend it as necessary with prayerful consideration for our context. We continue to look to MDH, CDC, WHO, and MAC for guidance, plus materials from faith organizations with wisdom such as this suggested plan from the Wisconsin Council of Churches: <https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church>.

As we learn to embrace being the church in new ways, I offer historical perspective: in a recent issue of *The Christian Century* magazine, they dusted off a 1918 editorial during the flu pandemic calling for churches to cease meeting in-person and applauding that “machinery has been set in motion for the use of the telephone to carry church news.” Today, we can call, email, text, Zoom, and stream with one another. While it will never replace being in-person together, I am grateful for how fortunate we are today with a new wave of technology that helps many people stay connected in ways our siblings in Christ in 1918 could only dream of.

In this in-between time, I ask you all to please continue to operate in two simultaneous frames of mind: we *may* be able to return to in-person gatherings soon and we may be *unable* to return to in-person gatherings for quite some time. We will be hopeful, we will be realistic, and we will be grace-filled with each other. Your grace and love to, for, and with one another is inspirational and reflects the face of Jesus in these challenging times. No matter the road ahead, the truth is loud and clear: the power of the Holy Spirit connects the members of the Body of Christ - thanks be to God! I am proud to be the pastor of such a great church!

In Christ,

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