



June 6, 2021

Good morning, Church!

Your church will resume in-person worship on campus beginning Sunday, August 1, 2021! Now *that* is a good sentence to begin this letter! This decision was proposed by your Regathering Taskforce, approved by the elected leaders of your Ad Board, affirmed by District Superintendent, Rev. Dan Johnson, and informed by your collective response to the regathering survey last month. Your safety is our most important concern and this decision is in alignment with this missional value. This letter details some of the changes, protocols, survey data, phase plans, and next steps forward.

I am grateful for your patience, grace, and support as a church these long months of “closed campus, open church.” It has not always been easy, yet God has been with us every step of the way. For some of you, August 1 can’t come fast enough. For others, you’re not quite ready. Either way, you are welcome. **The plan is to continue live streaming worship online and by touch tone phone.** That means you do **not** have to return to in-person worship or gatherings until **you** are ready, friends.

Here are the anticipated phases for regathering:

Phase 0	June 6	“Soft Launch”
Phase 1	Aug. 1	In-Person Worship, Outdoor Fellowship
Phase 2	Sept. 12	In-Person Worship, Outdoor Fellowship, Outdoor Sunday School
Phase 3	Oct. 3	In-Person Worship, Indoor Fellowship, Indoor Sunday School, Nursery
Phase 4	Nov. 7	In-Person Worship, Fellowship, Sunday School, Nursery, Small Groups

Beginning June 6, we enter **PHASE 0**, our “soft launch” season of preparation. Key leaders and servant volunteers such as ushers, greeters, and others who help “make Sundays happen” will be invited to experience worship in-person in waves. This will help the worship team transition from online-only worship experiences and give these key leaders insight into how to keep making Sundays happen. Current servant volunteer rosters will be contacted soon. **If you want to commit to be a worship liturgist, tech crew member, usher, greeter, offering counter, building opener/closer, or otherwise serve in a role to help make Sundays happen, please contact Linda Schmidt, Communications Coordinator immediately: rumc@richfieldumc.org / 612.861.6086.** We will need a renewed commitment from many to make Sundays happen. Is God calling you?

At the time of this writing, we are planning on the following protocols:

- Please wear your mask on campus until otherwise instructed (extra masks available).
- Building opens for worshippers at 9:00am.
- Fellowship: after worship, please exit the main doors and enjoy fellowship outdoors.
- Attendance: new check-in system for Sunday School and Nursery, worship sign-in system TBD.
- Hand Sanitizer: receive a portion on your way into the sanctuary.
- Offering: give online, by mail, or place your offering in the plate on your way in.
- Bulletins: limited print bulletins available, electronic bulletins encouraged (phone/tablet).
- Communion: take a single-serve cup/wafer or bring your own alcohol-free elements with you.
- Seating: Sit distanced by household, floor seating only, with ushers assisting as needed.
- Hospitality: No food or drink available.

In May, we received 72 responses to Regathering Survey #4 and we believe this represents more people per household overall. Average worship attendance pre-pandemic was ~125 and this is a representative survey. Here are some key data points used to weigh the decisions on our next steps:

- 99% of you said your household is vaccinated 100% or 100% except those with direct medical advice not to due to health conditions or children too young for currently-available vaccines.
- A combined 94% of you said it is important or very important/essential that a strong majority of the people at your church's in-person gatherings are fully vaccinated.
- You are overall comfortable/very comfortable abiding by necessary protocols (92%) and being lovingly reminded to do so (94%). You are less comfortable being the ones do the reminding (61%)!
- You are open to safety awareness training overall, including participating in safety drills such as fire drills (71%) and even tough to talk about drills like intruder drills (57%).
- Of those who participate in online ministries (Bible study/small group, team meetings, Lunch & Learn), 98% of you prefer not to switch to in-person meetings until there is a hybrid online model.

One critical change impacts us all: **we will gather in one united worship service on Sundays at 9:30 am in the Sanctuary.** By August 1, we will have spent 16 months worshipping with a variety of musical styles, traditional liturgy in an informal atmosphere, and interactive elements like lighting candles, prayer, and sharing the peace. Things that made Sanctuary and Living Waters worship wonderful are blended into a signature experience and your feedback has been abundantly affirming. **We are blessed that worship currently resembles what we had and is sustainable moving forward.** The adaptability of the worship team, the creativity of the servant volunteer tech crew, and the forward-thinking innovation of your elected leaders have worked to make this happen. Some churches were forced into a prerecorded-only scenario or are struggling with how to continue reaching people online once they regather. **We are well-positioned for the future of worship, thanks be to God!**

I celebrate all that Sanctuary worship and Living Waters worship have been for this church. While both have seen their fair share of change over the years, the shift to one united worship service is the biggest change to either in quite some time. It is okay to lament things that are lost and I am always glad to hear what you have to say. I also pray you will keep an open heart for how this change grants us a season of (re)building community, a sustainable work load for our servant volunteers, and accessibility for those worshipping online and by touch tone phone. **Thank you for your open hearts!**

Finally, here are a few special items to take note of, please:

- Worship is at the Richfield Bandshell on June 13 and Aug. 8 and Lake Harriet Bandshell on July 18.
- Worship will *not* be in-person on September 5 (Labor Day weekend) and December 26 (Day after Christmas). Worship will be **live streamed online and by touch tone phone only** on those Sundays.
- We are still working on items that will require careful planning and continued patience, including:
 - Church bus ready for travel (the goal is to have the plan announced before August 1).
 - Building hours for church members to stop by and paid staff on-campus work schedules.
 - Returning to in-person small groups, rehearsals, teams and committees, user groups, etc.
 - Returning to in-person pastoral care visits by care team members, paid staff, and clergy.
 - Continuing technology and/or campus upgrades.
 - Reopening God's Hands Thrift Store.

As we prepare for our next season as a church, I have never been prouder to be your pastor. Your love and perseverance consistently reflects the love of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will keep that love going as we move forward. May we embrace God's future, and be God's loving church!

In Christ,
Rev. Nate Melcher
Senior Pastor

SUNDAY MORNING 2021 REGATHERING PHASES:

PHASE 0 - JUNE 6, 2021

Outdoor Worship: Jun. 13, Jul. 18



Online
Worship



In-Person
Worship



Outdoor
Fellowship



Indoor
Fellowship



Outdoor
Sunday
School



Indoor
Sunday
School



Nursery
Care



Small
Groups

PHASE 1 - AUGUST 1, 2021

Outdoor Worship: Aug. 8; Online-Only Worship: Sept. 5



Online
Worship



In-Person
Worship



Outdoor
Fellowship



Indoor
Fellowship



Outdoor
Sunday
School



Indoor
Sunday
School



Nursery
Care



Small
Groups

PHASE 2 - SEPTEMBER 12, 2021



Online
Worship



In-Person
Worship



Outdoor
Fellowship



Indoor
Fellowship



Outdoor
Sunday
School



Indoor
Sunday
School



Nursery
Care



Small
Groups

PHASE 3 - OCTOBER 3, 2021



Online
Worship



In-Person
Worship



Outdoor
Fellowship



Indoor
Fellowship



Outdoor
Sunday
School



Indoor
Sunday
School



Nursery
Care



Small
Groups

PHASE 4 - NOVEMBER 7, 2021

Online-Only Worship: Dec. 26



Online
Worship



In-Person
Worship



Outdoor
Fellowship



Indoor
Fellowship



Outdoor
Sunday
School



Indoor
Sunday
School



Nursery
Care



Small
Groups