

Dear Sisters and Brothers of St. John UCC,

It has been a long journey since March 15, over three months, since the Stay-At-Home order was announced in the State of Illinois as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Who could have imagined? Who could have known? Who would have realized that it would be more than three months until next we would begin being able to worship together in the sanctuary, even if in small numbers? So much has happened, so much is happening and there is more which will be made known in the days ahead about COVID-19, about the Black Lives Movement, and about our shared journey together.

On June 26, our Governor moved the state to Phase 4, allowing us to gather 50 people in worship. In this letter, I wanted to briefly outline a couple of things for everyone to know as we plan our first worship together again on July 5 at 10 am. The Church Council has been working very diligently to make informed and thoughtful recommendations as to how the St. John UCC faith family can come together in worship safely, according to the guidelines established by the CDC, the State of Illinois and our own Insurance Advisory Board. The Church Council is currently preparing for our congregational return and to that end the rest of this letter is to make clear the many details:

- Not everyone will be ready or willing to return to in-person worship services, whether because of health, age or vulnerability. THAT IS ABSOLUTELY FINE. I/we respect everyone's personal decision about corporate worship and will honor that without question. Your Pastor will continue to send out mini-worship bulletins via snail mail and email mail so no one will be left out.

If you are not feeling well, please stay home until you are better. Here is the most up-to-date list of symptoms that may indicate the Covid virus affecting you. These symptoms usually appear two days to two weeks after exposure to the virus, according to the CDC.

Fever or chills

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue

- Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
- If you have recently traveled outside of the metro area, and especially to a COVID-19 hotspot, please wait 2 weeks before coming to church.
 - Only the south door will be open for entrance into the sanctuary. Please maintain appropriate space between yourself and others on the sidewalk, which will be marked. The door will be propped open until worship begins to avoid touching. Feel free to bring a personal bottle of water, if needed.
 - When you arrive at a door, you must wear a mask. If you forgot yours, one will be provided. An Usher will take your temperature. If it is 100 degrees or higher, you cannot come in. Your name will be written down for our records of attendees, which must be kept for one month in the event someone does contract COVID-19 and attended here.
 - An Usher will place a dollop of hand sanitizer in your hand for you to rub in before entering. Once you enter the church, the offering plate will be on a stand to welcome your gifts. We will have one sheet of paper with prayer concerns, announcements, words to the music you will hear, and reminders of the precautions we are taking. Take it home with you. There will be no bulletin as you remember. Everything will be on the screen.
 - Then you will be seated by an Usher. Seating will be first come, first served; from the front of the sanctuary to the back (no bargaining for back seats!) Ushers will seat people in every third pew to allow for 6 feet of distancing. Family groups will sit together. Children should remain with their parents. At first there will be no Sunday School or Children's Time.
 - Please do not hug or shake hands as you meet people. As much as we all want to, this is not helpful in preventing the passing of germs among us. If you have to sneeze or cough, do so into the crook of your arm.

- Although we will be sharing in Unison Readings and Responses, we will not have congregational, solo or choral singing, because of the high incidence of virus exchange as a result of the action of singing. We will have instrumental music present during worship, with videos of individuals, groups and choirs singing offered on the screens.
- It is best that the Pastor come in to lead worship, with a mask on, and depart without shaking hands or greeting. At the conclusion of worship, please be seated during the Postlude until the Ushers release you, starting from the back to the front, again to help limit the possibility of contact as people pass each other in the aisle. Please don't touch anything unnecessarily on your way out.
- You are welcome, even encouraged to visit with one another outside after worship with appropriate social distance.
- Sanitizing wipes will be available in the bathrooms to wipe surfaces you touch and please wash your hands.
- If this all seems a bit 'overdone', please know that it is all for your/our safety. Until there is a proven vaccine and/or cure, this may be the new 'normal'. COVID-19 is as serious as it is because it spreads easily and respects no age, race, economic or religious distinction. The leadership of St. John UCC loves who we are together and is striving to bring us together safely and well, so that we can enjoy each other's company and shared discipleship for many years to come. I trust you, too, will respect the actions they/we are taking.

Blessings on the journey of faith, wherever God leads us. Pastor Rosemary