

It is with joy, as well as prayerful hope that positive progress will continue, that I share with you the good news that Michigan, and in particular, Genesee County, is showing improvement in many of the COVID-19 benchmarks that we have been monitoring. While there is still much progress to be made, particularly with regard to increasing vaccination rates (currently at just about 40%), I, along with our church Administrative Council, feel that we are able to safely move forward with the next steps toward reopening. While these won't be our final steps, they are definitely in a desirable direction!

An Indoor and In-Person Worship Option

Beginning Sunday, July 4th, we will have an indoor option for in-person worship, in addition to our continued outdoor service. **The outdoor worship service option will begin at its new time of 9:30am and will continue to be LIVE streamed to our YouTube channel. The new indoor worship service option will begin at 11:00am and will take place in the sanctuary.** The indoor service will not be streamed online, though it will include the same scripture and sermon as the LIVE streamed outdoor service. As you make plans for which service you would like to attend, virtually or in-person, it will be helpful to know the following:

- The indoor service will not initially have congregational singing. This can and will change as recommendations from health experts make such recommendations. That said, both services will have worshipful music of some form each week provided by our worship music staff. If congregational singing is important to you, you may want to consider the outdoor service for the time being as the outdoor environment *does* allow for singing due to the obvious ventilation advantage.
- Though in the sanctuary, we will continue to social distance and practice proper mask wearing. Masks will be available, and the building, pews, and more will be set up in such a way so as to promote these continued measures. More will be said about this in just a bit.
- Much about this worship experience will feel familiar and even normal. While there will still be a few things that we're doing differently, both worship services will continue to be meaningful, inviting, and full of grace!
- At this point, recommendations from health experts still discourage activities such as coffee and fellowship hour. Until we can resume that wonderful time together, feel free to use the beautiful outdoor space at the church for greeting one another. We just ask that you remain mindful that everyone has their own comfort levels with regard to handshakes, hugs, etc.

Small Groups

Effective immediately, small groups may resume meeting in the classrooms, Library, and Fellowship Hall if they so desire. Groups who desire, instead, to continue using virtual means are welcome and encouraged to do so. Once again, please keep in mind that all in-person gatherings are asked to continue social distancing and masking practices.

Children and Youth

Programs and ministries that are designed for children under the age of 12 will continue to refrain from indoor gatherings until vaccinations for that age group are approved and made readily available and/or herd immunity is confidently achieved in our area. I am continuing to work with a number of our dedicated children's ministry volunteers to make sure we continue to serve the children in our church and community.

Youth programs, designed specifically for youth between the ages of 12 and 18 years old will continue to take place, whether they be virtually, in-person, indoors or outdoors or any combination thereof. These decisions will be made in consultation with, and at the discretion of parents/guardians, program facilitators, and the pastor.

Social Distancing and Masking

As I've already mentioned a few times, we are continuing to require masking and social distancing when at the church and when participating in the ministries of GBUMC. Despite recommendations that vaccinated individuals do not need to mask any longer, it is important to remember that, in addition to not being able to reasonably determine who is vaccinated and who is not, we are, more importantly, a church family with many who, by no choice of their own, are unable to be vaccinated at this point (children under 12 years of age, as well as those who are immunosuppressed). For this purpose we will all continue with our masking and social distancing practices in an earnest effort to demonstrate a sacred solidarity with *all* our brothers and sisters in Christ during this time. We will remain faithful to this specific effort of safety and hospitality until broad herd immunity is confidently achieved in our area.

As we continue through this challenging time, I cannot thank you enough for your continue patience and understanding. We are certainly making joyful and safe progress forward! As we continue to be the church and the Body of Christ for this world, let us rejoice and give thanks!

Blessings and peace, friends!

Pastor Brian