

May 11, 2020

Dear CUMC family,



Grace and peace to you. This letter is coming to you from Pastor Rick and Pastor Jen. We pray you are well as we continue to live into our new reality as it pertains to Covid-19. Please know we are holding each of you, our church, and our communities in prayer during this time.

We wanted to reach out to you during this time as it appears our state is beginning a time of transition from Governor Mills state- wide mandate to “Stay Safer at Home” Order. Over the next couple of weeks some retail businesses, restaurants and services will be reopening. In the life of churches and religious institutions, some have begun to hold drive in worship services in their parking lots and on church campuses. Perhaps you are wondering what this means for our own faith community, here at Centenary UMC.

Last week Bishop Devadhar and his extended cabinet sent out a letter with some guidelines about how to safely reopen our churches. The message stressed that “we will work through this together because we are in this together....and that we are connected through Christ.” It went on to make the following points.

In keeping with the highest calling of preserving life and honoring essential, sacrificial work, we will refrain from meeting in person for worship, retreats, Bible studies, and any other in-person church related gatherings until at least Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020. We will decide as a Conference when we will reopen our sanctuaries and campuses because of our connectional nature as a church. As the letter explains:

- We recognize that our Annual Conference spans states under the administration of six different governors. We understand that each governor will make recommendations based on each state’s context with regards to COVID-19. Some of these recommendations may be different from the Conference’s commitment.
- We recognize that the number of COVID-19 cases vary greatly from county to county across the Annual Conference. Some of us live in counties that have fewer than five cases, while others have thousands. Our personal and corporate experience of the need for social distancing may vary greatly in the coming weeks.
- We recognize that our ecumenical partners, independent churches, and faith communities may make decisions different from ours. Some in our local communities may begin to reopen their doors more quickly or more slowly than we do.
- We recognize that when we do begin to return to our churches and camps and places of worship, it will not be the same as it was before COVID-19. Our return will not be the great gathering of all of the people many of us have dreamed of and hoped for in this Easter season. Returning to offices and church buildings will be gradual, in phases, and not advisable for those in highest risk groups for some time.
- And, we recognize that we may have to take steps back if the virus resurges in the future.

In the meantime, leadership has been given guiding questions to work through in order to prepare for when we can offer public worship again. Pastor Jen is working with our Board of Trustees to create a small "Relaunch Team" to tailor these guidelines to best fit our context. There is much to do and when it comes time to open the doors again, you will have an important role to play.

However, for some people it will still not be wise to venture out into public spaces. Therefore, we will continue to offer online worship, just as we were doing prior to the COVID crisis. The difference is that we have one additional platform, -Youtube to do so.

A reminder that you can view live worship on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/centenaryfaith/>

as well as on Youtube. If you have difficulty with the Youtube link, you can go to our Facebook page and watch the worship service later under the "Video" section.

The weekly Grow Pray Study guides are posted each week on our church website under "Sermons" at [www.centenaryfaith.org](http://www.centenaryfaith.org)

These have proven to be the best way for us to stay connected in our worship life, as we pray, share prayer concerns in the comments and consider the Scriptures.

On another note, you may have heard that Bishop Devadhar has approved virtual communion. Previously, when Pastor Rick served communion during the online service, the elements were only blessed for Lori and himself. In the future, when either Pastor Jen or Pastor Rick presides over the Eucharist online, we will do so fully including you who are watching. You still don't need to have grape juice and bread - any food item and drink will do. But we will be including you and the elements in front of you as we call for the Holy Spirit to pour into the bread and cup, transforming it into the real presence of Christ, the true mystery of our faith.

We both thank you for your patience in these challenging and constantly changing times!

Included in this communication packet, you will also find the May issue of our Ad Council Messenger. The Ad Council, SPRC, and Finance Sub-Committee have all recently met to conduct church business using either Zoom or a Free Conference call platform. The Ad Council Messenger is full of updates on ministries and community outreach that is still taking place either through community meals, on-line and over-the phone Bible studies as well as Congregational and Pastoral Care.

Pastor Jen and her small group ministry have faithfully met each Wednesday at 1pm using a conference call platform. If you are interested in joining please call her at 207-242-2840.

Pastor Rick is launching a new 12-week Bible study focused on the New Testament. It's called "Disciple Bible Study Fast Track." This study will be on Thursday evenings from 7:30 pm - 8:45 pm. The format is to open with a video, which we'll watch together on Zoom, and then enjoy a discussion based on questions we'll have in front of us. This is a great way to learn the Bible, or to revisit the New Testament again, but get a chance to see how it fits together from beginning to end. Please email Pastor Rick at [rickm@centenaryfaith.org](mailto:rickm@centenaryfaith.org) to reserve your spot. The start date for this study is planned for May 28th!

He'll email you details after you contact him, but for those interested. There is a study guide that will be used. The cost is \$15.99 and scholarships are available.

As you can see, even though we are not meeting in person, our ministry and administration of the church continues.

That means that we need you to continue your faithfulness to God through your generosity and giving. Remember, we don't give to simply support our budget or pay bills. Followers of Jesus are called to be generous with God because we believe the church is the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today. Like when the disciples turned to Jesus and asked if they should send the thousands of people home to find food, Jesus turned to them and said, "You feed them!" (John 6:1-14). Jesus says the same to us - use the resources in your hand to make a difference in the lives of others.

You can give in two ways, The first is by simply sending a check to the church through the mail: CUMC, PO Box 630, Skowhegan ME 04976, or give online by going to the [church website](#). Thank you for your faithfulness!

As we continue our faith journey through this unique and challenging Easter season may we take heart that we are people of the promise and hope of Resurrection! Let us look to the future with great anticipation of the gift of the Holy Spirit as we enter the Pentecost season. Indeed, we are an Easter people! God goes before us! God goes with us! And with God's help we will persevere!

In Christ,  
Pastor Rick and Pastor Jen

#### **PRAYER LIST**

**Prayer Concerns:** Diane Arsenault, Toni Jo and John Blaisdell, Kevin Tansey, Tammy Neal, Ken Fitzherbert Jr., Elizabeth Fitzherbert, Babbette Eldert's brother-Roger, Gerald Gagne, Chris Veysey, Janice Stedman, Shirley Whittemore, Maxine Hardy, Wanda Quimby's sister, Corinne; Christina, Jasmine, Clarissa & "Gushie" Brown, Andrew "Goose" Curtis, Arthur Judd, Mark Corson, James Barto, Stephanie Smith, Bessie Ann Boggs, Patrick Fitzgerald, Joe Fitzgerald and family, Green family, Rose Richards, Krista, Tommy Lyons, Mr. Brown, Marjorie Saporita, Scott Giguere, Paige and Toby and Family, Joyce DePietro, Alice Emery, Avis Emery, Rodney Brown, Fran, Angel, Adam, Raven, family of Jim Trevains, Josh Breton, Edna Griffith and Jennifer and Jonathan, our first responders, health care workers, the homeless, Skowhegan Community, all unspoken prayers, The Zimmermans, Bradley UMC.