



Pastoral Letter

May 14, 2020

Beloved of God, grace and peace to you in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus the Christ.

I continue to pray for you each day and trust we are safe as we live into Jesus' resurrection promises. We continue to struggle in making sense of our current reality during the COVID19 pandemic. We are realizing that what we thought would be a sprint is actually a marathon. As weeks stretch into months, many have a strong desire to re-enter Calvary's facility.

Calvary is a beloved community of Jesus Christ comprised of people of various ages and physical conditions. If we preclude any from gathering in our facility but permit others based upon age or physical condition, then we cease to be a beloved community of faith as God has formed us — we become something lesser, something discriminatory.

Therefore, Calvary will not provide in-facility worship until all in our community may gather safely. Our congregation — all of us — should gather in person for worship only when all have confidence and assurance that we, as a people, are safe and are not assuming undo risk when we gather to worship God.

We are blessed with the ability to worship together online each week from the safety of our homes, and to participate in studies and gatherings online during the week. We maintain our spiritual connection in this way where none are excluded, all are welcomed, and all experience the Spirit's presence without risking personal or communal safety.

So, with that in mind, we are asking the question, "What's next?" While many unknowns remain, we are learning more about the virus and how we are responding to it. Our Bishop, Latrelle Easterling, realizes that much thought and preparation goes into the process of facility re-entry. Last week, she directed that every local church develop a Re-Entering Well Team to begin thinking through the process of facility re-entry. In response, our Church Council chartered a Re-Enter Well Team to prayerfully discern a process so that, when it is safe to do so, we are ready to cautiously and slowly re-enter Calvary's facility in a manner that protects the health and well-being of occupants. I'm thankful to the Council and its Re-Entering Well Team as they begin mapping out this process. I know they will continue to evaluate the process and risk associated with facility re-entry, and will keep the First General Rule of the United Methodist Church in the forefront of their discussions and deliberations: Do No Harm!

I'm also thankful for all who work so diligently to continue our worship and small group presence online. Each week, dozens of people contribute and participate in online worship and faith development in innovative ways. As a result, some are asking what will happen with our online presence when we reintroduce limited in-facility worship. Please know that I fully intend to continue Calvary's growing online worship presence.

Our online worship is expanding Calvary's footprint beyond the Mt. Airy community. We now have worship participants from several states and even overseas. Some have reached out to me with questions, prayer requests, and words of support and thanks. This exciting

development invites us to rethink what it means to be an active participant of Calvary, and how we can extend the love and support of the church to those who actively participate but are not in our local area. Our understanding of 'church family' is expanding, and we are thankful for this new opportunity to reach people with Jesus' love, compassion, and message of salvation. So, when we are able to re-enter Calvary's facility as a worshipping community, we will not abandon those who join us through our online presence.

Please know that all who participate in Calvary's worship and spiritual formation are deeply loved and immensely valued. Everyone, regardless of risk category, must be able to participate in Calvary's worship and faith development activities. And, everyone, regardless of where you live and how you worship with us, is equally valuable to us. So, rest assured that our online presence will continue and hopefully grow.

Our message and work remains the same. Calvary UMC continues to make disciples of Jesus Christ by living faithfully, serving sacrificially, and loving deeply, whether you live in Mt. Airy or elsewhere. We continue to connect, learn, and serve together, where ever we may be. And, all are loved and valued deeply, whether gathering in person or online. God's invitation to follow his Son, Jesus Christ, and love others in his name is not limited by space or time. Please know how thankful I am that you've chosen to join us in your faith journey! It is an honor to serve as your pastor, where ever you may be!

Your pastor in Christ,

Rev. Bill Maisch