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Minister's Message

When Are We Opening?

People have been asking. Some ask out of a sincere desire to return to the “good old days” of sanctuary worship (was it only 4 months ago?); others just ask out of curiosity. First, it’s important to note that though the building has been closed for face-to-face worship for months, the church (that’s you and me) has been open all along. Worship and ministry has evolved, but we never “closed” either—though they do look different. And the survey results indicate we’re on the right track with worship.

It is unfortunate that the COVID pandemic has become so politicized. Sometimes it seems the science is being drowned out by the politics. And it is confounding at times, as the science also evolves, as to how the virus spreads and what the risk factors are. Our leaders continue to meet regularly and we review the question every time.

Right now, there is clear evidence that large gatherings in closed spaces present a demonstrable risk of transmission. The longer a group remains in a closed space, the higher the risk. Singing increases the risk. The reasons we suspended face-to-face worship in March remain the same. This is a time to consider the most vulnerable among us. And since we are able to worship and carry on many elements of our ministry without face-to-face worship, there is no compelling reason to resume at this time. I am directing the staff to make their fall plans with an assumption that we will not return to sanctuary or chapel worship before Christmas.

We will be looking for a few safe occasions to gather in-person. There’s another Parking Lot gathering on Saturday morning, July 18, from 10:00 to 11:00. We learned a few things from last time and we’ll be a bit more organized. We’re also looking at how we may gather for some sort of outdoor service later this summer.

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(Minister’s Message—Continued from cover page)

In the meantime we are looking at what the fall programs might look like during this socially distant season in the life of our church. Your gifts of virtual presence and participation, along with your very real support through your prayer and your gifts, will ensure that we continue to bear witness to the transformational and healing love of the Risen Christ.



Annual Celebration of the Rocky Mountain Conference

Annual Celebration will look different than usual this year! While we love having the chance to gather in person, that is of course not possible this summer. However, that does not mean Annual Celebration is canceled. Instead of being over one weekend, there will be Annual Celebration ZOOM events taking place July 20 - August 1. Highlights include talks by renowned author and theologian The Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite and The Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister of the UCC. Registration is free but required by July 20. Register online at: <https://rmcucc.org/event/annual-celebration-2020-leading-in-troubled-times/>

First Congregational Preschool Closes

After more than 50 years of providing quality preschool education to children of our community, the First Congregational Preschool has closed. Many people of our congregation worked here—the most recent being Karen McLeland. Many more attended as children and then sent their children.



Vacation Bible School (At Home) 2020!

“Doing a new thing!” Vacation Bible School has gotten underway with 38 participants of all ages! Using existing curriculum from MennoMedia’s *SHINE VBS*, our Family Faith Formation team has created a highly immersive, hybrid VBS experience utilizing an at-home VBS-In-A-Box Kit for each participant, paired with an online website portal with dozens of videos and other program content. We’re looking forward to sharing more about our week with you!



VBS 2020





We are excited to update you on the progress we are making in our search for our new Minister, Head of Programs. While much of the work of the Search and Call process happens behind the scenes, we certainly don't want this important process to fall into the category of "out of sight, out of mind" for our wider church community.

In June, after three months of faithful and diligent work, the Profile Writing Team finalized our church's profile for the position of Minister, Head of Programs. This was no small feat to accomplish! The nearly 60-page document gives an overview of who we are as a church community, a vision for who we believe God is calling us to be in the future, and a description of the ministry position we are currently seeking to fill. Since the end of June, this profile has been available to potential candidates through the UCC Ministries Opportunities online database.

Upon completion of their work, the Profile Writing Team passed the baton to the Search Team to begin the next phase of the process. Our 12-member Search Team has already met numerous times to become acquainted with each other and to understand our role in the search process.

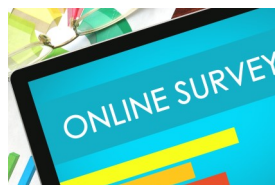
The Search Team is now beginning to receive profiles from candidates interested in our church's open position. As profiles come in, members of the Search Team will prayerfully and thoughtfully consider candidates and will discern which candidates to interview. Eventually, we will narrow the field of interested candidates to the one we believe God is calling to be our next Minister, Head of Programs. At that time, we will present this candidate to the congregation for a congregational vote.

While there is no exact timeline that can be put on this process, we are excited to already be receiving profiles from candidates interested in the opportunity to serve our church community. While it is important that members of the Search Team keep specific details of the process confidential, we will keep you updated as we make progress in the search. We trust that the Holy Spirit is with us as we begin this process, and we ask for your prayers as we seek to faithfully fulfill this exciting and important work on behalf of our church family!

With hope and faith,
Ashlyn Friend & Michelle Heiny, Search Team Co-Chairs

Survey Results

About 110 people responded to our survey last month regarding online worship. We are grateful for the wide participation and the results are encouraging. 95% of you are satisfied or very satisfied with our online worship. The other 5% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This may be biased in that people who don't tune in to our online worship probably didn't respond to the survey. But it's still a good sign.



There were many suggestions in the comments section, which are quite helpful. The Children's Moment and Music seem to be on target (those who want more or less of each activity are virtually tied!).

Your readiness for face-to-face worship is more complicated. 17% are ready now without restrictions. Another 11% would return with restrictions. 60% are waiting for a treatment/vaccine or new development. And 10% probably won't return to the sanctuary as long as we have an online option.

Here's a figure that surprised me: of all the activities that help people stay connected, online worship is far and away number one. A clear number two is this Bell newsletter! All the others had significant support and we'll keep doing them all for the time being. And we're looking at new ways to stay connected.

If you'd like a copy of the complete results with comments, we can email it or send a hard copy. Just let Carol Thompson know in the church office.

New Sunshine House Lease



Our Trustees have entered into a new 10-year lease agreement with Sunshine House, the day care facility attached to the north side of our building. This lease provides a stable monthly income for the church and a clearer understanding of several maintenance and usage items.

Special meeting note about ballot

On March 22, members of our congregation were to vote on whether to call the Rev. Ben Konecny as Minister - Head of Staff effective January 1, 2021. We were not meeting in person and our Constitution does not provide for anything but in-person meetings—so the meeting was postponed.

This is a vote that must take place in a timely fashion as we move forward to call a Minister - Head of Programs. Our Cabinet has called a meeting of the congregation on Sunday, September 13, at 10:00 a.m. It's likely our building will not be open, so we're planning on a gathering in the parking lot. We only need 55 people for a quorum, but our desire is to include as many people as possible. To that end, we will be mailing out ballots in mid-August. Those returned to the church office before the meeting will be tabulated and considered, though they are prohibited from being counted in the congregational vote. If you do not receive a ballot before the end of August, please contact the church office. More details of how we will gather on September 13 will be released later this summer.



Sunday Morning Anti-Racism and White Privilege Conversation

The recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery has moved the topic of racism back onto center stage in our country. Many of us are looking for ways to deepen our awareness and understanding of the persistence of racism, our unintended participation in racist systems, and what we can do to make a difference right now. Our Sunday Morning Conversations class has begun looking at these questions using a curriculum developed by the UCC called *White Privilege*. If you are interested in joining this conversation, please contact Rev. Ben to get more information.

Traci Blackmon | John Dorhauer | Da Vita McCallister | John Paddock | Stephen G. Ray

WHITE PRIVILEGE
let's talk

A Resource for Transformational Dialogue

Financial Secretary Change

Two months ago we received a note from Linda Johnson indicating that she wished to retire no later than September 1, 2020. Linda has done a splendid job keeping our financial books in order and we are sorry to lose her as a staff member. The good news is that Linda remains a member of First Congregational and will stick around!



We are pleased to announce that we have hired Sandi Olsen to be our new Financial Secretary. She will begin training with Linda about the time this issue of the Bell is mailed. Though there will be few opportunities to greet her face-to-face, we hope you will welcome her when you get the chance.

Here are a few introductory words about Sandi: A 5th generation Coloradoan, Sandi has lived in the Kersey area for 16 years. She earned her B.S. in Finance from Missouri State University and an M.A. in Media Technology from the University of Northern Colorado. She enjoys reading psychological thrillers, gardening, antiques, and spending time with her family. Becoming a mother and grandma are her most fulfilling accomplishments. Her favorite saying is by Tena Desae: "Stay positive and happy. Work hard and don't give up hope. Be open to criticism and keep learning. Surround yourself with happy, warm and genuine people."

Capital Campaign

Our Trustees are working to refine plans for the Capital Campaign. Though we have been delayed by the pandemic, we have every reason to carry on. For one thing, this may be an excellent time to remove some pews from the sanctuary and replace them with chairs, allowing for more efficient "socially distant" seating when we are able to return. We just completed painting in Chadwick Hall and continue to complete small upgrades. But the big items still need attention and funding. We hope to roll out more definite plans later this summer.

