



First United Methodist Church  
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**As an example of suffering and patience, beloved,  
take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. – James 5.10**

December 2, 2020

Dear friends and family in Christ,

Over the past two evenings, I have met with the Safety Team, Church Council and Trustees. After discussing the current increase in COVID cases throughout our region, the recently updated Pennsylvania state protocols and recommendations, and our own commitment as United Methodists first and foremost to do no harm, the decision was made unanimously to return immediately to **online worship only, beginning this Sunday, December 6, until at least the end of December**. As we approach the end of the year, we will monitor and revisit that decision as to whether or not it needs to be extended beyond that time, or whether we may then return to a more open worship in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings.

This is not a decision we have made lightly, but rather with much awareness and reluctance given the significance of this time of Advent and Christmas. We recognize that this is not what many might desire, but we believe it is incumbent upon us all, as your church leadership team, to act responsibly and provide as safe an environment for our worship and work together as possible. Indeed, at this time, we all believe that this action is the most responsible action that we can take at this time to protect and care for all who might choose to come on any given Sunday.

Along with this decision, we have also agreed that there will be **no organized meetings or activities** within the church until further notice. Two exceptions to this will be the Treasures for Children and Christmas for Seniors distributions, but these will be held in the parking lot as “drive-in” distributions only. The decision has also been made to cancel the planned Christmas Dinner “drive-in take-out” scheduled for December 12. The pastor’s Advent Bible Study will continue virtually utilizing ZOOM, rather than meeting in-person. If you are interested in joining this Bible Study, please contact the pastor immediately so that you may be included in our virtual learning together.

Throughout the past week, I have learned of no less than eight of our own members who have been diagnosed with COVID. Some have already apparently recovered from it, although being left with a lingering tiredness;

others, even as I write this, are fighting through a variety of symptoms. None, to my knowledge, have had to be hospitalized, and for this I give praise and thanks to God. None of these have been to church recently enough to have unknowingly exposed anyone here. This just reinforces in my own mind and heart that your church leadership team is taking both appropriate and prudent action to prevent exposure or transmission of COVID here.

**The church will still be open daily** for those who desire to enter the sanctuary for private prayer, seek conversation, prayer, and/or counseling from the pastor, utilize the church library, or to bring your offering. Leah and I will continue to be available here to assist you with anything you might need, just as we have been all through the COVID protocols which began in mid-March.

We **WILL CONTINUE PROVIDING WORSHIP** in which you may participate through live streaming on our church's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/firstumcreynoldsville/](http://www.facebook.com/firstumcreynoldsville/)) at 10:45 am each Sunday.

We will also continue to provide a link on our website ([www.fumcreynoldsville.org](http://www.fumcreynoldsville.org)), by which you may access the recording of the livestream any time after the service ends, even if you do not normally use Facebook or have a Facebook account.

This has been the most challenging and often frustrating year I have ever experienced in over 38 years as a pastor. As I've said several times throughout the past 9 months, "Seminary didn't train me for this!" Nonetheless, we do not lose heart. We are not defeated. God is, and has been, and will continue to be with us through all of these challenges. As James wrote: "**As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.**" We will continue to live into the example of the prophets by continuing to practice the spiritual fruit of patience throughout this pandemic. Advent is still our season of preparation, and Christmas will still be our experience of receiving anew the joyful gift of God's gracious love coming to us, right where we live, and as with angels, shepherds, and magi of old, we will rejoice!

Finally, I encourage you to continue to pray for one another, encourage each other, and hold all in the love of Christ every day.

By His Grace,

*Pastor Tom*