

Dear Church Family

It has been a difficult couple of months. The COVID-19 pandemic has touched all of our lives to varying degrees and it continues to prevent us from resuming life as we knew it before the crisis began. Among the many changes we are grieving is the loss (albeit temporary) of our church community. Now that Gov. Raimondo has indicated that churches may reopen, you are no doubt wondering when we can begin worshipping together once again.

The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, established three “General Rules” for the people called Methodists: Do no harm. Do good. Attend upon all the ordinances of God. As we begin to make plans for reopening, our priority will be Wesley’s first rule – doing no harm. If we err in our decision making, we want it to be on the side of caution rather than haste. With that in mind, here are some things you should know:

- In addition to the RI Department of Health guidelines for reopening churches, the Conference has released guidelines for reentry. You can read the guidelines and view a recording of a webinar about reopening churches at www.neumc.org/virus-reentry
- An AMUMC “Reentry Team” has been formed to review the issues involved in reopening the building, to study the guidelines established by the Conference and the RI Department of Health for church reopening, and to explore solutions to the significant logistical challenges to resuming in-person worship. The team will report regularly to the congregation about its work, and your input is invited. You may send your concerns, suggestions, questions, and feedback to reentry.amumc@gmail.com
- It is clear that we will need to observe social distancing for quite some time. This includes such practices as maintaining a 6 foot distance between individuals or families, significantly limiting the number of worshipers in the sanctuary, making hand sanitizer widely available, having no contact with shared objects such as hymnals, offering plates, etc. Stephanie Bennett, a pastor in W. Virginia, posted an eye-opening video that illustrates just how much of a challenge social distancing will be. You can watch it at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?t=239&v=1571759062981699>
- Immediately after any space in the building is used, it must be properly sanitized. This will be difficult, if not impossible, to do between multiple worship services such as the 8:30 and 10:30 services.
- Research has shown that "Successful Infection = Exposure to Virus x Time". This presents a problem to gathering in an enclosed space such as the sanctuary for an extended period time (vs. moving quickly through a grocery store or passing someone on the street).
- Singing by either the choir or the congregation is prohibited per guidelines issued by the State and by the Conferences. The use of any wind instrument (including the pipe organ) is also strongly discouraged.
- In addition to when and how to return to worship in the sanctuary, when we reopen the building to church groups and outside groups, we will need to ensure proper sanitizing of the space after each use, and to determine that those entering the building are not infected.
- It is notable that a church in Ringgold, GA recently closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak among its members three weeks after their reopening. This was in spite of observing all recommended precautions, including social distancing guidelines.
- We will explore in-person worship alternatives to gathering in the sanctuary (such as outdoor worship). We will continue to offer online worship, even after in-person worship resumes. For those without online access, we are offering DVDs of the worship services. (Contact me at 401-335-5156 to arrange no-contact delivery of DVDs.)
- We will continue to conduct meetings, studies, prayer meetings, Kids’ Time, virtual coffee hour, pastor’s office hours, and church events via Zoom until we have reopened the building. Links to all regularly scheduled meetings can be found on the home page of the church website (www.amumc.org) or the

church's Facebook page. For those of you without internet access, contact me for instructions for calling in to those meetings by phone.

- We will not reopen the building or restart in-person worship until we are able to comply with all the guidelines, and more importantly, to ensure the safety of all who enter our church building. The bottom line is that we do not yet have a reentry date and do not expect that it will be in the near future.

I hope you will join me in praying for wisdom and guidance as we develop a plan to reopen the building and return to in-person worship. Let us remember that ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all who enter our church building is one way of loving our neighbors as ourselves as we "Do no harm".

Until we are able to be together again, "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." (Genesis 31:49 KJV)

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Arlene".

Pastor Arlene