

Dear siblings in Christ,

August 17, 2020

I am writing to you today with what I hope will be good news. We will be resuming in person worship at Monaca UMC August 30th at 11am. We will continue to follow all CDC guidelines for social distancing and cleaning protocols, along with wearing masks while in the church. Our doors will be locked 20 minutes after service to prevent prolonged gathering in the church after worship. Our worship services will be recorded and uploaded to YouTube and the website without change. Over the past month, I have remained steadfast about not returning to in person worship too soon. I would like to share with you the reasoning behind my change of thought.

I have had many conversations over the last three weeks asking why we are not in person for worship when many other UMC's are. My answer has been that we are not to exceed the 25-person indoor gathering limit set by the governor's mandate. Even though religious communities are exempt from government mandates, I have chosen to limit in person gatherings to do our part to help with the solution to COVID 19. Other churches that remain in person for worship are smaller and their worship attendance may not exceed 25. Please understand my call has been, is, and will always be faithfulness to those in authority over me, per my ordination vows. However, in the past week I have spoken with colleagues who pastor medium to larger size churches that are worshipping in person and the attendance exceeds the 25-person limit. A few days ago, I discovered I have some "wiggle room" when it comes to the indoor limit, as long as all safety measures are firmly in place. All of those measures ARE in place for us, so I am using my "wiggle room" to gather us back together to worship God in ways that all can be safe. By reopening for worship, I am not dismissing the seriousness of COVID-19. Millions are sick from this virus and thousands upon thousands have lost their lives. Our everyday lives have been transformed, and there is the possibility we may never go back to "normal" again. Since "normal" is fading fast in our rearview mirror, we must look through the windshield and begin to map our future. That future will take us into a deeper relationship with Jesus and with others as we continue to learn what the Church was meant to be. I pray in person worship will not limit our desire to reach outside of our doors to connect with those who need Jesus. If you're not comfortable with coming back to church yet, I understand and respect your decision. Please continue to worship online. When you are comfortable, we'll welcome you with gladness. I encourage you to share the news with others about beginning in person worship at Monaca again. In closing, I ask you pray for our world leaders as they continue to lead in the midst of a pandemic. I ask you pray for our first responders and those tasked with trying to develop a vaccine for a virus they truly don't understand yet. I ask you to pray the Church continues to proclaim the power in a loving, living relationship with Christ. I ask you to pray for one another during this uneasy time. I look forward to seeing you back in worship on August 30th!

God's blessing in all we do,
Pastor Ross